

MILITARY CHAPLAINS'

REVIEW

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# Military Chaplains' Review

Preaching

Winter 1986





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Winter 1986  
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## Preface

The *Military Chaplains' Review* is designed as a medium in which those interested in the military chaplaincy can share with chaplains the product of their experience and research. We welcome articles which are directly concerned with supporting and strengthening chaplains professionally. Preference will be given to those articles having lasting value as reference material.

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The *Military Chaplains' Review* is published quarterly. The opinions reflected in each article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Chief of Chaplains or the Department of the Army. When used in this publication, the terms "he," "him," and "his" are intended to include both the masculine and feminine genders; exceptions will be noted.

Articles should be submitted in duplicate, double spaced, to the Editor, *Military Chaplains' Review*, United States Army Chaplain Board, Watters Hall, Bldg. 1207, Fort Monmouth, NJ 07703. Articles should be 12 to 20 pages in length and, when appropriate, should be carefully footnoted. Detailed editorial guidelines are available from the editor.

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*The Military Chaplains' Review* also prints an occasional non-thematic issue. Any subjects having to do with chaplain ministry are appropriate for such issues.



# Homiletics—State of the Art, 1986

**The Rev. Dr. William Thompson**

The Constitution of the United States requires the President to present a “State of the Union” address each year to the Congress. What a formidable task! Only a bit less formidable is this attempt to report on the present state of the homiletic art. In this article, I attempt a description and evaluation of what tens of thousands of preachers do in pulpits of widely varying sizes, shapes, and traditions all over this vast land called America—and I look into my homiletical crystal ball besides—to hope for what may come of the preaching ministry tomorrow, and especially in the ministry of military chaplains.

My first and most important descriptive task is to report that a renewal of preaching is going on. It is a real renewal, if judged only by the number of people who watch and listen to preachers on television or by the proliferation of books and articles on preaching. But in addition to these signs of renewal, there are a host of other signs—the great numbers of preachers who attend an ever-increasing number of seminars and workshops on preaching, the emergence of preaching contests in seminaries, a growing membership in both the Religious Speech Communication Association and the Academy of Homiletics, as well as the commercial success of “homily helps” and “sermon services.”

My observations cannot begin to provide an accurate description of preaching today—there is too much of it for one person to observe with any kind of total comprehension. Can anyone even



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begin to count the number of sermons preached each week in neighborhood churches and synagogues, on military bases and in hospital chapels, in denominational gatherings and funeral homes, on radio and television programs, in seminary preaching laboratories and college chapels? I listen to a great many student sermons, as many radio and television sermons as I can (that number is steadily decreasing as I get older and less tolerant of mediocrity), seminary chapel speakers, and a great many homilies by military chaplains. While my academic and seminary connections keep me in an ivory tower most of the time, my wider contacts—with parish clergy, with Army and Navy chaplains and with the realistic demands of my own preaching assignment week by week—enable me to keep my ears and eyes open to the real world of preaching.

## The Reality

The countless number of books on preaching that have been flooding the bookstore market in the recent past constitute the first reality. Within the last few months, readers have been able to choose among four major homiletics textbooks: John Killinger's *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Westminster, 1985), Fred Craddock's *Preaching* (Abingdon, 1985), Deane Kemper's *Effective Preaching* (Westminster, 1985) and *Proclaim the Word* by E. Eugene Hall and James L. Heflin (Broadman, 1985). Beside these, there are a number of new books that focus on one dimension of preaching. Eugene Lowry's *Doing Time In The Pulpit* (John Knox, 1985) uses the concept of time to link narrative and theology. Dennis F. Kinlaw's *Preaching In The Spirit* (Francis Asbury, 1985) offers a long-needed look at the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. Insights from the world of Black preaching come through such books as J. Alfred Smith's *Preach On* (Broadman, 1984) and Warren H. Stewart's *Interpreting God's Word in Black Preaching* (Judson, 1984). Books of sermons by women demonstrate the strong theology and keen insight of women called to ministry; *Spinning A Sacred Yarn, Women Speak From The Pulpit* (Pilgrim, 1982) and *Women and The Word; Sermons* (Fortress, 1978) are examples.

Preaching is increasingly recognized as an important, if not the best, integrator of theological education. Frequently professors from the theological, ethical, and pastoral fields participate in preaching laboratories or give guest lectures on preaching as they see it from the vantage point of their own disciplines. These specialists are as likely as homileticians and practicing preachers to give leadership to conferences on preaching.

Since preaching normally takes place in the setting of worship, preaching's integration with worship deserves special mention. In the churches, there is a slow but certain moving toward each other by two liturgical extremes: 1) the tradition that overvalues the sacramental,



the ritual, the mystical, the “right-brained” to the deprivation of the preached word; and 2) the tradition that overvalues preaching to the detriment of the ceremonial, colorful, and beautiful worship of the highly liturgical churches. More and more free church ministers, especially Baptists, are ordering their preaching according to the lectionary readings, although they seldom let their congregations in on the secret.

Preaching is also moving back to the more traditional forms. During the late 1960’s and the early 1970’s, both worship and preaching often took experimental forms. John Killinger’s book, *Experimental Preaching* (Abingdon, 1973), and my own book (with Gordon Bennett), *Dialogue Preaching* (Judson, 1969), reported the various experimental designs for proclaiming the Word. However, these days one hears very little of the experimental or offbeat sermon. Perhaps the cultural move to the right has reinforced the traditional conservatism of preachers, with regard to content as well as style. Perhaps congregations wish their preachers to remind them of the verities in the verified manner. Perhaps the model of powerful Black preaching has put to rest the faddish use of the overhead projector and small group approach. Some current theologians view preaching as essentially a one-way communication of God’s word to humanity, necessitating the “one-to-many” form of communication, the paradigm of which is found in the biblical revelation; e.g., in Jesus and the prophets preaching to attentive listeners.

Congregational involvement in preaching has likewise tapered off. To be sure, there is still the occasional report of the lay Bible study group that meets during the week to help plan the sermon, or the sermon feedback group. Thesis project papers by D.Min. candidates report continuing experiments with such groups, but their number is small. The predictions of a decade or so ago that the churches were moving toward significantly greater lay involvement in preaching simply did not develop.

However, a trend I did not see developing a decade or two ago is the growth in number and quality of narrative sermons. Both theology and culture have contributed to this growth. Theology is being understood and written about as fundamentally a narrative enterprise. Two helpful books that develop this insight are Michael Goldberg’s *Theology and Narrative* (Abingdon, 1982) and George W. Stroup’s *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (John Knox, 1982). Joining them in releasing the power of narrative are the liberation theologians. They are asking how are the oppressed of our world to enter into the biblical story? Their answers are vastly different from those generally accepted by traditional, white, middle-class ways of understanding. (See Justo and Catherine Gonzalez’ *Liberation Preaching*, Abingdon, 1980).

Today preaching is more popular than in a very long time. The polls show a slight decline in church attendance, but ever increasing numbers of people watching televised sermons. I am amazed by the number of people I meet, especially in the business community, who regularly watch Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power." The reported figures, dollars in the millions, contributed to the television preachers is evidence enough of the size of their audiences. Although a scholarly analysis is beyond the scope of this article, a quick explanation for their success would certainly acknowledge that the TV preachers say what their audiences want or need to hear, use easily understood language, and employ effectively the visual impact, music, and timing of good showmanship. Certainly all these factors contribute to the extraordinary popularity of these preachers.

Another interesting dimension of the commercialization of preaching is that both profit and non-profit organizations are earning a great deal of money from preachers who buy sermon subscription services. Because the companies involved are privately owned or run by church agencies or religious orders, few reliable figures are available, but at least one service that complies with federal law requiring the publication of circulation figures reports a total paid circulation of 2,716 at \$30.00 per year. One can only guess at the cost of overhead, payment to editors, writers, printing, and postage; but clearly it is a profitable enterprise. Finally, as Clyde Fant puts it in his *Preaching For Today* (Harper & Row, 1975), "Preaching has a double stubbornness: it is stubbornly the same and it is stubbornly there." In spite of the prophets of homiletical doom who predicted that other forms of communication would usurp preaching's place, it has not happened. Neither drama nor dialogue, encounter groups nor movies, counseling clinics nor simulation games, the printed word nor the television screen have supplanted preaching - the prime mode by which God communicates Himself to His people in the life of the church.

## The Future and Hope

Hope is called for because persons concerned with the church's preaching always live in a certain measure of despair for preaching. However solid my belief in the efficacy of God's word through my sermon, I know that it has touched only a few of the people for whom it was intended, and then with something woefully short of the life-changing possibilities of the Gospel. However deeply I am committed to the integrity of preaching as the center of ministry, I know that it is largely unrelated to the church school program, the pastoral counseling ministry, and the general life of my denomination. However carefully and prayerfully I come into the pulpit, I know that my sermon is a pale shadow of the Light I have come to show forth. So I



rejoice in every evidence of change, and I pray and work toward resolving the issues now alive in homiletical theory and practice.

From my experience and reflection, six areas emerge as offering possibilities for homiletical hope. Preaching as prophecy is again becoming a serious issue for preacher's today. In his provocative article in "Christian Century" (July 15, 1981), Lawrence E. Durr reminded his readers of the distinction between the called prophets and the professional prophets. "It was not unusual," Durr writes, "for the professional prophet to stand against the called prophet. As Isaiah remarked, the professional preached peace—when he should have been warning against impending destruction." Jeremiah stood alone in condemning the immorality and corruption of the nation while the professional counseled compromising treaties with foreign nations. It would not be far from the mark to say that clergy today—like clergy of every era—face the same dangers as the professional prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. Though we give lip service to our prophetic call, we are yet on the payroll. Our keep is paid by those we serve, and often that makes it difficult to speak prophetically. How rarely does one hear sermons and stories that even allude to the demonic value systems touted by the multi-billion dollar television industry or the rock music industry? Who is interpreting with biblical insights the statements of some national leaders that a strong military establishment is America's only hope for peace? What does a chaplain say or do with the knowledge that decisions which unnecessarily endanger human life are being made by fellow officers?

The second area for hope is the increasing amount of communication research being pursued in the interest of preaching. Myron Chartier has made a significant breakthrough with his recent book, *Preaching as Communication*, (Abingdon, 1981), in which he has brought to bear on preaching some of the most significant research findings and theoretical formulations of recent years. One finds increasing numbers of D.Min. research projects that bridge the fields of homiletics and the social sciences, as well as increasing references in books on preaching to the findings and theories of communication scholars. However much work in this area remains to be done since it is a very recent interfacing of fields. Today some are asking about the role of public opinion studies and psychology in helping to shape preaching's agenda; about ways that research in human perception may enrich the preaching task; and about the impact of rapidly changing cultural values and social mores on the way people hear preaching. Writers on preaching are only beginning to utilize the methods of literary and rhetorical criticism to provide rigorous evaluation of contemporary preaching. The excuse for homiletics' poor showing in this endeavor is that there is no common body of understanding as to what "good" or "effective" preaching is. That, of

course, is precisely the reason that budding literature on homiletical criticism needs to be pursued with even greater vigor.

We have just begun to see the potential power in the preaching-as-story movement, the third area in which I find hope for the future of preaching. I keep going back to the communication style of Jesus and the apostles who would not be caught dead with a well-organized exposition of an obscure biblical passage. Their task and privilege was to tell the story—and to live the story—linking truth and story in their own acts of compassion and confrontation. One can purchase all manner of hints and helps on “expository preaching”—however you choose to define that slippery term—but nothing beats the dramatic telling of the greatest of all stories, played out on Mt. Sinai and Mt. Calvary.

The final hope I have for preaching is that it is getting better and better. I am really tiring of the laments I hear that the day of great preaching is over, and that the church had better learn to live with mediocre preaching. That is rubbish! As Clyde Fant points out so tellingly in his *Preaching For Today* (Harper & Row, 1975), that lament characterizes every generation. Interestingly, it always invokes the memory of the great preachers exactly two generations previous! The fact is that theological seminaries have been making important strides in the preparation of preachers. Professors of homiletics are better prepared, video equipment is in almost universal use, biblical and theological scholarship is introducing new rigor into the content of preaching, and preachers are attending continuing education programs on preaching in record numbers. Perhaps more than at any time in history, one can wander into a church in almost any town, and with a high degree of probability, hear a content-filled, well-delivered sermon.

The same is true for military chapels. There is clearly room for improvement, yet some of the finest preaching I hear is in the training seminars for military chaplains. I routinely play videotapes for my seminary students of three military chaplains who exemplify superb preaching content and style. Whether as a theorist or practitioner, today is the most exciting period in this century to be involved in the enterprise of preaching. The challenge of the age and of the society, with its pains and problems and craziness unique to the end of the century, places an intense demand on the preacher—civilian or military. As never before, today the people to whom we minister are listening to the preacher for the Word of God—a word of clarity and sanity and hope. Ours is a day of great opportunity and great promise.



## Preaching In An Apocalyptic Age

The Rev. Herbert O'Driscoll

In the 12th chapter of the book we call *Revelation*, there is reported by the Apostle John, a vision. The images which compose it are precisely and clearly described. The central figure is that of a woman. As with all dreams, rules such as that of relative proportions do not necessarily apply. The woman is surrounded, as is our planet, by the sun, the moon and the stars. As is the earth and its human society, the woman is pregnant, she with a child, our world with great possibilities. The woman, as does our earth, cries out in anguish. For both, this birthing of the future is full of agony.

As she struggles there comes before her a great dragon. With his tail he sweeps the stars from the sky, as indeed we have learned to do with nuclear fire threatening the winter of the world. The dragon waits in front of the woman, waiting to devour the child when she gives birth. But the child is swept from the great jaws, the woman flees into wilderness and the forces of heaven engage the forces of the dragon.

Such is the dream which John tells. There have been many meanings taken from it to serve many purposes and many ideologies. There will be many more. As a human being of this particular time, in my telling of it, I see certain allegories which seem to speak to my time. Like Paul in *Romans*, Chapter 8, I am aware of the pangs of possibility in myself, in my society, in international relationships, and across standards of living and culture and ideology. I am aware of great possibilities in the maturing of humanity's relationship to the



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living planet itself. All these things are a tantalizing promise of birth, future, hope, and possibility.

I am aware, too, of the dragon, the shadows, the threats, the death structures, the coming of the fire and the night and the great winter. And you perhaps will see other meanings. I cannot, for instance, help noting that the newborn child is not consumed by the dragon. That to me is hope and promise and grace, as it may well be for you.

I am going to presume that you and I have in common an unrelenting responsibility. We must speak regularly and in a disciplined way to other men and women about the mysterious realm where Christian faith and human experience encounter one another. We must do that when we want to do so and when we do not want to do so. We must speak of faith when we sometimes feel doubt. We must speak of life when we feel like death. We must speak of Easter in what is for us sometimes Good Friday. We are aware of few certainties. Among them is the chief certainty of our inability to embody the glory of which we speak. We are, of course, also aware from our experience that the things given to us by holy scripture to say are sometimes so powerful and grace-giving that, among the dead whom they unexpectedly and wonderfully raise to life, are you and me, the preacher! I shall presume that you and I know these things, that we have experienced them, and that in our better moments we give thanks for them.

Such is the personal experience we share, but personal experience is set in a certain society, in a certain time, a certain history. I want to make such links. I want to try first to set a context in which you and I do our preaching, to try to name the present times, and therefore, of course, to try to name at least the near future. Malachi Martin, that articulate if maverick Jesuit, once said, "No child can tell the outline of its mother's face while it still lies in her womb." Thus he expressed the limitations on all of us who would search for the outline of the face of the future. But we do so because we must and we always will.

You and I are called to preach the Word of God in the closing years of the second Christian millenium. Some of us will preach that Word in the third millenium. What, so far as our limited minds can perceive it, may be some of the categories of Christian spirituality which these "end and beginning times" call forth in human experience? It is, I think, important that we try very hard to discern some of these categories, because they form the context in which you and I must try to speak responsibly, not to mind our trying to live responsibly, as Christian men and women.

" . . . I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips . . . " (*Isaiah* 6:05). No description of the situation we are in can improve on this single sentence torn from Isaiah as



he wrestles to accept the call given him in his vision in the 8th Century B.C. Notice that he does not merely say that he is “a man of unclean lips,” unsure of his self worth, unsure of any contribution to make to his society. He adds a most 20th Century cry of agony. “I dwell,” he cries out, “among a people of unclean lips.”

To know one’s own moral poverty is a common human experience. To feel that the human institutions of one’s society and time are themselves corrupt and perhaps incapable of carrying the society into the future can be terrifying. There is something of this in Isaiah’s cry. There is something of this in each of us and in our contemporaries. All of which is a way of saying that the primary category of spirituality today is apocalyptic.

It is a measure of the last decade that the word *apocalypse* has entered normal conversation. Rather than offering involved explanation, let me share an image or two. Suppose we could view the last two thousand years of Western history as a stretch of countryside over which we could fly in a time machine. Looking down we see many different kinds of ages of history. Green (peaceful) times, desert and rocky (troubled) times and so on. But at least three times in our journey, in the 5th century, in the 14th century, and in the 20th, we would encounter a vast gaping canyon. Its sides are the past and the future torn from each other in a discontinuity in time’s flow. The past is recalled mostly with guilt, regret and nostalgia; the future is anticipated with fear and anxiety. The present is for some a chasm to be existed in rather than a place for living; its image, a pit of meaninglessness and annihilation.

Yet precisely at those canyon points in our time journey we would also see soaring above the chasm a sacred mountain. Because the nature of human experience in apocalyptic times is to be pitched constantly between the pit and the peak. Spirituality in apocalyptic times rushes back and forth from the dark night of the soul to the beatific vision, from the pit of possible annihilation to the mount of possible transfiguration. In terms of another discipline, we could say that to be alive in apocalyptic times is to be manic depressive. All of us in some measure are, and we would benefit ourselves and one another by spending less energy trying to disguise it.

In such a time of history there comes a wide spectrum of spirituality. John Macquarrie of Oxford has said that contemporary spirituality is born from the two wombs of awe and injustice. It is not always a healthy spirituality. It spans a spectrum from the psychotic spirituality of a Jim Jones in a tropical jungle to the Christlike spirituality of a Teresa in the urban jungle of Calcutta. Apocalyptic spirituality tends to be highly effective and intense. We can see that the intensity and fragility flickering in people’s eyes and sounding in voices as we look out from altar or pulpit. We have all as clergy learned to expect its sudden angers, its unpredictable enthusiasms, its

high laughter and its tears. To all this we ourselves are vulnerable if only because we too are men and women of these frenetic times, walking with our demons and tasting the sands of our own desert paths in our teeth.

In apocalyptic times there are three demons with which our preaching must do battle. The first is anxiety; the second, uncertainty in everything; and the third, a sense of the loss of the future. From these three come two more demons, called into existence by the first three. To deal with the demons of anxiety and uncertainty there appears the deceptive demon of strident Fundamentalism, offering its cheap cure for anxiety and its easy certainties. Likewise there comes, from a sense of the loss of the future, the demon called Millennialism, a passive fundamentalism, not wishing to dominate history and human affairs as does Fundamentalism, but rather dismissing history and all human effort as irrelevant, leaving the resolution of the future entirely and utterly in the hands of God.

If any such remarks about apocalyptic spiritualities are true, then it follows that genuine Christian spirituality needs to become unapologetically humanist.

We tend to be defensive about that word *humanist*, guarding ourselves against those who always link it with the word *secular*. We must never hesitate to say that Christianity is a humanism. The heart of the Christian good news is that God becomes human. It becomes necessary to preach this unequivocally in an age such as this. It becomes necessary to sound constantly and at every opportunity that which the Bible sounds constantly: when God wishes to act within human history, God seeks a human being through whom the divine will may be done.

Abraham at his executive desk in Horan, managing his affairs; Moses contemplating early retirement and domesticity on the slopes of Mt. Horeb; Esther accepting responsibility for her people; Mary in her quiet village; Levi assessing his tax accounts on the quayside; Paul riding to Damascus complete with government forms and secretaries. Everyone of them and a countless host since, including in tiny ways and for modest purposes ourselves, became and becomes the instrument of God's purpose.

We gaze up at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to see the hand of God outstretched to a man in need of energizing. The other arm of God rests on the shoulder of a woman and the fingers of the left hand of God touch a child. Thus is our role imaged as the stewards of God in nature and in history.

Never should we forget that, although C. S. Lewis' Aslan is the divine figure in Narnia, Aslan of himself cannot bring spring to Narnia without the coming of the four children. Christians who claim that Christian spirituality must never cease to be humanist, never cease to affirm the human contribution to and co-operation with the



will of God. They are in no way indulging in arrogant secular humanism. It is not Julian Huxley in the 19th century, but Saint Augustine in the 5th century, who dared to say, "Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not."

So then, I am suggesting that because much contemporary spirituality is apocalyptic, then it is essential that it also be made humanist.

The third category of a suggested spirituality for our time I would call cocreational. While it is not the only Biblical image, no other more vividly describes this stewardship than the story of Noah and the Ark.

An old world is drowning. Even to say those deceptively simple words is immediately to taste the timelessness, the terrifying contemporaneity of these images. Before the drowning, God searches, dare we say it, with anxiety, for a human being to say "Yes" to building an Ark which will make the future possible beyond the world's drowning. Eventually a voice says "Yes" to the searching God.

To the building of what Ark have you and I said "Yes" in this drowning time of history? The Ark of your own soul or psyche? The Ark of the institutions of which we are a part? The Ark of the quality of life in the family we may have been given or the greater community we live in? To some Ark and at some moment we have said "Yes" to being its builder. In a drowning time we can be only one of two things, a passive drowning victim or an "Arkbuilder." You and I daily try to name ourselves "Arkbuilder" and to remain true to that vocation. Every time we stand in front of people and speak to them of the things of the Gospel, we use the wood of the cross to build for them an Ark to enable them to be themselves "Arkbuilders."

In a brief and similar analysis of contemporary spirituality, Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of the Orthodox Christian communities in Great Britain, comments, "We have grown small because we have made our God into an idol and ourselves into slaves. We must recover a sense of the greatness of God revealed in Christ, and the greatness of humanity revealed by him. And then the world may begin to believe, and we may become co-workers with God for the salvation of all things."

Another similar voice is that of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, that great Christian whose hands dug the dust of the world's rock formations while his spirit flew to the divine heart which pulses at the center of the universe.

Every person, in the course of their life, must by their fidelity, starting with the most natural territory of their own self, build a work into which something enters from all the elements of the earth. We make our own souls throughout all our earthly days, and at the same time we

collaborate; in another work which infinitely transcends the perspectives of our individual achievement. We collaborate in the completing of the world.

Teilhard de Chardin

I have stayed with this aspect of contemporary spirituality because I think it vital that our voices in preaching sound this theme. As we well know the times are dark and threatening enough to rob us of moral energy and will. It is easy, and millions have succumbed to it, to embrace a neurotic Christian stance which sees our humanity as the passive recipient of the actions of a wrathful God bringing an Armageddon to cleanse the world without our effort. Ironically many who embrace this view see the same wrathful cleansing god using as the instruments of this raptuous purging the very weapons we ourselves have invented and brought to proliferation. All of which is the reason I plead for such a co-creational spirituality and preaching as I have described.

To describe a further category for a spirituality we might seek and preach I will use a word lovely and poetic in itself. I speak of a spirituality that is *Elpidian*. In other words I speak of a spirituality of hope. We betray our generation if we are not heard to preach the things of hope. Again we begin with the evidence of scripture.

One of the clearest and most consistent patterns in scripture is the capacity of men and women not only to envision and commit themselves to a possible future but to do so in circumstances which are far from hopeful in the present moment in which they are living. One of the great gifts of Judaism to us is this amazing capacity to commit oneself to a future peace in a present war, to a future well-spring in a present desert, to a new land in a present wilderness, to a future Shalom in a present Holocaust. It would seem that this capacity to hope is well nigh unconquerable, that it prevents immobilization and surrender to the present oppressiveness, and that it fosters responsible action, commitment, creativity and decision.

We must preach what the Exodus journey preaches every step of its painful dangerous way. There is somewhere an old Jewish reflection on Torah which says that there was only one single thing of which Moses was really afraid on the journey. He was not terrified by enemy tribes, nor by bitter poisonous wells nor by an unspeakable climate and barren terrain. He was afraid only that the people would lose hope, for then, and only then, would the journey end.

To engender this hope Moses was adamant that the people should hear and learn and live one all important precept. More than once he pointed to physical phenomena which he saw as imaging this essential truth. To a people constantly tempted to look back down the long shadows of the western sunset toward Egypt and its gods, Moses and Aaron again and again drove them to look eastward to the God



in front of them, to the God of their future, who awaited their faithfulness in the journey forward.

There is in the 10th verse of the 16th chapter of *Exodus* a shining moment of such a spirituality of hope. Moses and Aaron have had yet another wrestling with a despondent Israel. Dissatisfaction is inching toward revolt. The people wish to turn back. The argument ends with the ending of daylight. Then as dawn breaks, comes the verse I refer to, the 10th. It says simply, "They looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared." All of which seems to be saying to us that only to the degree that we are ready to acknowledge our place in time as a wilderness will we be enabled to see in it any glimpses of the glory of the Lord.

Biblical hope—its songs, its images, its exhortations—is not mere logical outpourings of hopeful times. Noah launches his pathetic bird into a raging maelstrom. Elijah sees a future of Israel in a panarama of bones white under the sun. John envisions a Holy City in an urban civilization of particular brutality and violence. In the Bible, it is the paradox of hope which appears again and again.

Jurgan Moltmann, contemporary German theologian and biblical scholar, says there are two ancient words for the future, one of which we have, to our peril, forgotten. The two words are *futurum* and *adventus*. *Futurum*, he says, is the future as we see it from our surveys, our questionnaires, our extrapolation of trends. He calls that future "the future of social calculation." It is not to be dismissed. It has significance, but it is not all. There is flowing toward us, what Moltmann calls "the future of ethical anticipation," that future which we can grapple with only by dreaming, by envisioning, by intentionally hoping. Much of our richest and most creative theology is "the future of ethical anticipation." It can be our most therapeutic and energizing theology; it can also be the most revolutionary. To the south of us there is a continent finding in its half-forgotten Catholicism scriptural images, stories, histories and myths which are igniting visions that are "futures of ethical anticipation." It is not an accident that it is the voice of Bloody Mary in a long ago musical comedy, "South Pacific" who sings, "If you don't have a dream, how you gonna make a dream come true?" There is the classic folk expression of the future of ethical anticipation, and it is sung by a voice of the Third World.

Yet surely visions of the future do not need to be the possession only of the politically oppressed, the hungry, the poor? Surely, there is sufficient sense of inner oppression, sufficient spiritual hunger and poverty within all of us, not to mention the most obvious evidence of faults within our own society, that we too can seek a "future of ethical anticipation." In so doing we are heirs to everyone in scripture who "sought a better country, who looked for a city whose builder and maker is God." *Hebrews*, Chapter 11 is ethical

anticipation. So is *Revelation*. So are the images of the Kingdom voiced by Our Lord. The images of Isaiah, of the mountain of the Lord, of a great highway in history, these are the images of ethical anticipation and of Biblical hope. Every time we break bread and pour wine in Christ's name, we are doing an exercise in ethical anticipation, in dreaming of a kingdom, of acting out hope.

The complex reality of our time makes it impossible to see a clear unclouded vision. However, these are some elements of spirituality which, it seems to me, might well be reflected in our preaching today. You may think otherwise. All of us see "through a glass darkly."

But if we return for a moment to the scriptural vision we began with from Chapter 12 of *Revelation*, we see, however imperfect, that the dragon does not devour the Child. The Child is preserved and grows to be Lord of our personal lives and the Lord and Hope of history and time. He is forever the basis of an unquenchable Christian hope.

# The Field Preaching Experience

Chaplain (Captain) David W. Smartt

When a chaplain relates to the soldier in the field, preaching is a vital ingredient of the mission. The field environment is unique and provides its own special atmosphere for worship and for preaching. This uniqueness serves to flavor the sermon with richness, and while often challenging the chaplain, enhances the preaching experience. In the field, the opportunity arises to transcend the mundane and to become the “church in the wilderness.”

The sermon in the field is different from the homiletical discourse one might expect to hear in the comfortable surroundings of a chapel facility. There are several factors that distinguish the field preaching event; several elements which give it definition and character. To examine these factors more closely, let us consider the ramifications of field preaching in terms of the impact of the chaplain, the message, and its delivery. The views that are expressed in this article are based on a Christian theology of preaching and are drawn from my own experience and free church perspective.

## The Field Preacher

It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the message from the messenger when speaking of preaching in the field. The two are closely intermingled and interdependent for effectiveness in a way that does not apply so obviously in the chapel setting. The most essential characteristic of the effective chaplain in the field is a genuine appreciation for the listener—the soldier. This aspect is essential to purposeful and effective preaching. The ministerial process must



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focus in every case on the individual, looking beyond the behavior, as Christ did, into the soldier's heart. Christ set the pattern for this dimension of ministry in his dealing with the woman who was about to be stoned to death for her act of adultery. In response to judgment by accusers, Jesus began to write in the sand. Though Holy Scripture does not record what he wrote, it must have been powerful. His words in the sand caused the accusers to leave one by one. Knowing their hearts, Christ was able to identify their own sinfulness. Feeling guilty and exposed, they were no longer able to condemn the adulterous woman. Jesus, who could have condemned her, refused to do so. Instead, he graciously ministered the love of God to her. Ministry must see beyond behavior and into the heart of a soldier in need.

Maintaining a non-judgmental approach is vital to the chaplain's field preaching ministry. Some of the soldiers who come to the field worship service would never go to a chapel or church building. Part of the reason these soldiers do not go to church ordinarily is because they believe "good" people go to church. They would feel hypocritical to attend church and continue to lead what they believe to be godless lives. Also, some of these soldiers have been discouraged by people in churches who were supposed to be Christians, but did not display even the most fundamental of Christian virtues—love and forgiveness. The field service, the field church, is a "come-as-you-are" atmosphere—not only in terms of clothing, but also in terms of who we are with each other and before God.

Soldiers in the field come to worship with few facades and certainly without the mask of false goodness that characterizes the worst of Christian piety. The soldiers are there for worship. They are often dirty, tired, maybe homesick; but they have come looking to the chaplain for words of strength and comfort and faith. It is imperative that the chaplain reflect in the message an acceptance and an appreciation for the soldier as a person. As a chaplain who preaches, I must be able to look beyond appearance to see the need of the heart.

Another essential tool of effective field preaching requires the chaplain to have a personal understanding of the grace of God. In the life of the preacher, the grace of God finds full expression when the chaplain knows the need for grace. In other words the chaplain must come face to face with his own vulnerability and sinfulness. The Pharisees of Christ's day had a problem recognizing their own imperfections. They had the law, the institutions, and the answers, but failed to have compassion because they did not recognize their own need for grace. Jesus did not condemn them for their sinfulness, but he condemned them because they thought themselves righteous. The pharisees, who were described as "whited sepulchers"—righteous on the outside but like dead men's bones on the inside—were so outwardly perfect that no one could get close to them. Ministry in the

field cuts away the crust of distancing moral perfectionism, and replaces it with demands for authenticity, closeness and friendship.

For my preaching in the field to have credibility with the troops, I must always remember that I stand in need of the grace of God. The foot of the cross is level ground, and at that place I share the spiritual struggles as I share the physical struggles of the other soldiers. If I forget this truth, then I have separated myself from the soldiers, and I have rendered my message ineffective.

Private devotions are vital to my personal and pastoral identity as I relate to the troops in the field. While training in desert operations and in combat environments, I have often found myself too busy maneuvering, visiting the troops, or attending briefings to practice my own personal devotions. Whenever this happened, my preaching and my presence grew stale. I believe strongly that the field preaching experience requires the seasoning of fresh and vibrant moments of personal reflection and prayer. As I take the time to gather my thoughts and my spirit—to focus my prayers—to provide time for reflection and insight, I am better able to preach a current and inspiring message to meet the needs of the soldier in the field.

I have discovered that while in the field, it is necessary for me to schedule a block of time to be alone for prayer and personal reflection each day. Often it has been late in the evening when most of the activity of the day has quieted. It is in those short moments each day that my field sermon is formulated. Not only does the field sermon come together, so to speak, but the field preacher as well.

Finally, my level of commitment in terms of my being actively available to the troops in the field has significant bearing on the preaching experience. Much of the impact of the field sermon is already determined by the extent to which the troops have seen the chaplain actively participating with them in the field exercise. Even when I know my homiletic efforts have been less than adequate, I sense the deep appreciation from the soldiers for my having been there, and for my having taken the time to care for them.

It has been my experience also that as I make the rounds in visiting the troops, I gather members for my congregation. The commitment I receive from the troops for the worship experience is related to my level of commitment to them on a daily basis. Some soldiers will come to the field service because of their traditional religious associations or because of their own personal commitment to God. However, I am convinced that many of them come because they sense the commitment of the chaplain to them as persons. This commitment pervades the preaching experience and paves the way for effective ministry.

In summary, the effectiveness of the preaching event in the field is based in great part on the chaplain's total ministry as he conducts it in group or in one-on-one encounters with the soldier,



and it must be in keeping with the whole character of the chaplain's ministry.

## The Field Sermon

A field sermon is not entirely different from a sermon preached in the chapel. Yet, there are several factors that give it distinction and a certain uniqueness.

To begin with, field sermons are different in terms of preparation. I have found it helpful to do some preparation prior to the field exercise. However, on an extended field problem there must be a certain amount of preparation done in the field. Furthermore, several realities of the field mitigate against the kind of preparation that I might give to a sermon in garrison.

In the field, time is a very important element. I have found on deployments that due to my need to be constantly active and on the move I have to carefully schedule preparation time. While time may be scarce, time spent in the preparation of the sermon is as important as time spent in visitation. If I cheat the sermon of preparation, then I have cheated the troops of my best to offer. The chaplain must balance troop visitation with the giving of time to sermon preparation.

Limited time, however, is not the only drawback. Preparation in the field is also hampered by limited resources. It is impractical—if not impossible—to designate a set of commentaries to be included in the load plan. Because of this, I do not have the luxury of word studies and exegetical aids to thoroughly study the text. I am forced to rely on previous knowledge of the text and on the limited materials at my disposal. While these limited resources may be thought of as a drawback, they may also be seen to have paradoxical and positive benefits. As I am forced to dig into my own inner resources, the door is opened for freshness and spontaneity. As necessity is the mother of invention, so limited materials foster and stimulate creativity. I am forced to find the new, the fresh, and relevant in the scriptural passage. This often leads to a surprising immediacy and current meaning to the message of the preacher in the field.

Keeping in mind the unique drawbacks to field sermon preparation, I then follow three primary guidelines in preparing the message. In the first place, I examine the current situation of the troops. It is important to know the kind of training in which the troops are engaged, and what problem areas and issues of concern there may be for the unit. I must be sensitive to morale of the unit and to the way the members interact and work together. I look for possible signs of discontent as well as for signs of *esprit de corps*. I must be aware of the training calendar and how it impacts on families and consequently how that may be influencing the performance and attitude of the troops. In the second place, I examine my own feelings. I look at



how I feel about the current situation and examine what kinds of emotions surface as I train with the soldiers. I find out what feelings I am experiencing in my one-on-one encounters with the troops and try to differentiate those feelings and to understand them. I try to be honest about what I am sensing and how it affects me. As a third primary guideline, I search for theological meaning in the present situation. I ask myself how the Word of God speaks to the issues of the present situation. How does my relationship to God help me deal with the realities of the current situation? In finding theological meaning, I am really finding how God intervenes within the life situation—in this case, the situation of the soldier in the field.

On a recent deployment to the deserts of Egypt, I followed these guidelines. First, I examined the situation. We were thousands of miles away from home and from our families. We were in a foreign country, and we were asked to work closely with soldiers who spoke another language. We were suddenly in a different culture, confronted with different customs, and forced to deal with people who have a very different outlook on life. Moreover it was hot and dry. Hot and dry! Sand was everywhere, ankle-deep, and trees were few and far between. Egypt was not the green, humid swamp of southeast Georgia.

Secondly, I examined my personal feelings. I was at once both excited and depressed. I was excited because I was in a new place, a foreign country that before I had only read about. I was fascinated by the language and customs of the people, and how vastly different they were from that to which I was accustomed. But I was also depressed. I had been away for a short time, but already I missed my family. Very soon I began to miss things like water fountains, street signs, and hamburgers. Soon I was missing shade trees and grass. This place was not home, and I missed home. I also realized that I was far from alone with these feelings of culture shock and homesickness.

Next I looked for theological meaning in my unit's present condition. Given our current situation, what could be the word of the Lord for us? We were "Strangers in a Strange Land," and that is the sermon that came out of this milieu. Taken from a passage in Isaiah, the setting of the scripture indicated the Israelites had received a prophecy concerning their exile. The Word of God contained two basic truths for Israel in a critical moment of history. First of all, God promised to continue to love them. It is so easy to feel unloved when you are a stranger, but God reminded Israel that his affection for them had not changed. Secondly, God promised Israel that he would be present with them. They would, no doubt, have moments when they would feel, because they were in a strange land, God had forgotten them. The promise of God was that he knew their situation, was aware of their needs, and would be with them throughout their difficulties.

As we were strangers in a strange land, we needed the assurance that God was with us. Surrounded by a nation with a Moslem national religion in a volatile section of the world, it was comforting to sense God's presence with us in His Word. It was reassuring to know that His loving care had followed us.

With these three primary guidelines as the basis for my preparation, there are several other aspects I consider essential to the preparation of a good field sermon. Simplicity is the foremost. Following the advice of a successful preacher and teacher, I make the sermon as simple as possible. After all, simple preaching is the model Jesus left us. It is interesting to note that the most prominent sermon left to us in scripture by our Lord was preached in the field. The Sermon on the Mount was a field sermon. This striking model of Christ's suggests that the field sermon should be simple, profound, and easy to remember. The spiritual realities Jesus was preaching to his followers were not couched in scholastic, rabbinical terminology, with which he was, no doubt, familiar; but in the language of the listeners.

On other occasions Jesus spoke to his followers of the "salt of the earth" and the loss of its savor. He talked to them about candles, light hid under baskets, and a lighted city on a hill. He shared with them images of lilies of the field, treasures in heaven, specks of sand in the eye. He told them about fathers providing food for their children and foolish builders who construct houses on sandy foundations. His sermons were full of fresh, down to earth, illustrative language.

Soldiers in the field need simple sermons that speak to them where they are. It is not that simplicity denies regard for the intellect, but that in simple format and in understandable terms the soldier is spoken to, encouraged, and challenged to respond.

Another aspect to keep in mind for a good field sermon is the appropriate use of humor. Humor is important for dealing with the stress and the tension of the field. It not only functions to open the ears and hearts of the soldiers in the field, but humor also counters the heaviness and the fatigue of life and soldiering in the field. The wise writer of *Proverbs* says that a merry heart is like medicine to the soul.

## **The Field Preaching Event**

A final aspect to consider is the actual delivery of the sermon or the preaching event itself. The field preaching experience culminates at this point. The delivery of the sermon may be only a ten or fifteen minutes long, but it represents hours of prior preparation and thought. All of the factors influencing the preacher and the message are brought together in the preaching moment. If the preacher has

done his work with the soldiers, and if the sermon has been adequately developed in the light of the uniqueness of the field environment, the preaching moment can be a powerful event of spiritual impact for the participants.

In terms of the event itself, there are two features that should be considered in order to heighten the effectiveness of the moment. First, a conducive atmosphere in an appropriate location is critical. The spot must be chosen with care and thought. If the unit is in a combat training posture, I must consider such things as the tactical issues raised by a group of soldiers clustered together.

Beyond the aspect of safety, it is also necessary that the preaching event take place in a worshipful setting. If at all possible, it helps to move away from the main activities of the unit to allow for reverence, reflection, and rest. The chapel, with its symbols, automatically creates such a setting. However, in the field, the chaplain must intentionally create the environment through choice of location and disposition of the field worship setting.

In addition to location, the manner of delivery of the sermon is significant to the effectiveness of the preaching event. In every sermon it is important to speak with authority and warmth. In the field it is paramount. As I am able to preach the message that I feel in my heart, I am more effective in reaching the hearts of the soldiers.

Preaching in the field can be one of the most powerful and visible means for reaching out to the spiritual needs of the troops. Through this medium, the chaplain has the awesome responsibility and opportunity for transmitting the Gospel message into the present life situation of the soldiers in the unit. Success is a matter of the preacher-chaplain's personal approach to ministry, the distinctive challenge and benefit offered by the uniqueness of the field environment, and the impact of the dynamic process by which the chaplain speaks with power to the spiritual needs of his soldiers.



## Preaching in the Army Showcase

Chaplain (Major) Paul W. Dodd

Fort Myer, Virginia, and the Fort Myer Memorial Chapel pulpit are in some respects a microcosm of the Army and of the military pulpit. But in several respects, Fort Myer is unique. Its population and its situation set it apart. A cross-section of the entire military community—Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines—lives in or near Fort Myer. Located in the national capital area near the Pentagon, Fort Myer is at the cross-roads for national and international military life. While it is not the average Army post, and although the worship communities are unique to this place, the principles for effective preaching used at Fort Myer apply to most pulpits within the military community. It is hoped that this article will do more than describe the preaching dynamics found at Fort Myer. The article seeks to underscore some of the common, universal qualities of proclamation of the Word of God in any military pulpit.

I've often thought it presumptuous to call Fort Myer the "showcase" of the Army, and I expressed some reluctance when asked to write this article for that reason. Yet Fort Myer is unique among military posts, and that singular role, as it bears on the work of chaplaincy, should be celebrated. The flagpole of the Army is here. Critically situated on the same turf as the Pentagon and Arlington National Cemetery, this stately old post is the station for some of the Army's most elite military units, as well as the home of senior members of the Army staff. The personnel of the Military District of Washington (MDW) are the guardians of the nation's capital, the



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precision masters and ceremonial musicians for state occasions, and the solemn bearers of the dead who are brought to Arlington National Cemetery for final military honors and burial.

However there are times when Fort Myer seems more like a three-ring circus than a showcase. More weddings and funerals are held in the old Post Chapel than possibly any other place in the armed forces.<sup>1</sup> Fort Myer is routinely the staging area for activities and events seen by the world on major network television newscasters. If by showcase one means activity and visibility, then indeed we at Fort Myer live in a glass house seven days a week. In that sense, the term “showcase” is very fitting; and in that sense, preaching at Fort Myer is preaching in the Army showcase. Against the background of MDW’s challenging mission and unique environment, the term is descriptive and realistic.

## **Theological Framework for Preaching**

As with any pulpit, preaching at Fort Myer is a reflection of the chaplain’s own theology of ministry. As one of the regular preachers here, my sermons reflect, in the first instance, a personal theological framework on which my ministry is built. Therefore much of which follows is personal and incorporates, as one might expect, my own religious views.

Of the essential functions of the church gathered, none is quite so important as corporate worship. While personal devotion, family or group meditation, and the “electronic church” share significant and valid roles within the religious community, they cannot replace the worship experience of the church gathered for celebration and proclamation. Dr. Gardner Taylor, in an address at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School in 1982, speaking of the numerous media preachers, stated that television ministries “can never take the place of worshiping congregations.” Corporate worship, in its many forms and expressions, is a distinct, universal, and indispensable characteristic of the church.

An assembly becomes a community when worship occurs, and in the Judaeo-Christian view, the term is understood almost exclusively within the context of the gathered people of God. The two reciprocal truths seem to be: (1 Communities are born through the corporate experience of worship, and (2 corporate worship is perpetuated as the people of God bond together through the fellowship of the church. The church at worship is an irreplaceable event within the community of faith.

<sup>1</sup>Two excellent papers regarding the wedding and funeral ministries at Fort Myer are “A Military Chaplain’s Design for Helping Couples Prepare for Remarriage,” an unpublished doctoral dissertation, by CH (LTC) Theodore W. Hepner, and an article by CH (LTC) Thomas Warme, “At Arlington Cemetery the Sermons Came to Life,” *Military Chaplains’ Review*, Spring 1978.

Dr. C.W. Brister, in his book *Pastoral Care in the Church*, observes that “the chronology of pastoral care flows from worship to calling, from preaching to counseling, from group work to personal ministry. In turn, the private ministry informs and vitalizes preaching and worship.”<sup>2</sup> Worship is the central and focal point of pastoral ministry, and preaching is a vital focus of corporate worship. The centrality of worship and proclamation forms the powerful nucleus from which all other avenues of ministry emerge. The responsible chaplain must therefore take a yeoman’s share of the responsibility in leading the church to become a worshipping community.

## Historical Sketch of the Chapel

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the long and rich history of Fort Myer (earlier Fort Whipple) began a new chapter with the seizing of the estate of General Robert E. Lee by the federal government for an alleged delinquent federal tax bill. The land overlooking the Potomac was to become Arlington National Cemetery and Fort Myer. The post, in the nearly two hundred years of its history, has been of tactical significance because of its high ground overlooking the river, and in more recent years, for its role as the ceremonial arm of the Military District of Washington and home of much of the Army staff. Because of its proximity to the Pentagon, the Post Chapel has traditionally been, in an unofficial sense, the “seat of the Chief of Chaplains.”<sup>3</sup>

While the history of Fort Myer is as colorful as that of the nation’s capital and while the worship life on post matches the vitality of the installation, one recent development in chapel ministry has been of singular importance for the chaplaincy and for the post. During the late 1970’s, a comprehensive parish development project was conducted at the Post Chapel under the leadership of former Post Chaplain William A. Martin, COL (USA ret). Out of that extensive endeavor grew a clear and concise statement of the worship community’s mission, an ingrained and continuing commitment to Management by Objectives and Results, a deep sense of biblical stewardship, and perhaps most significantly, the formation of a Parish Council. The impact of these developments still plays a vital role in the life and work of the congregation. A description of the parish development process at Fort Myer was prepared by Chaplain Martin and may be found in the *Military Chaplains’ Review*, Fall 1981.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>C. W. Brister, *Pastoral Care in the Church* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), p. 112.

<sup>3</sup>Porter H. Brooks, *Cross, Crook, and Candle: The Story of Religion at Fort Myer* (Military District of Washington, 1974), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>William A. Martin and Norman D. Self, “Parish Vitalization Project: Fort Myer,” *Military Chaplains’ Review* (Fall 1981), p. 109.



Someone once described an ancient church building as being as if the very walls themselves were filled with prayers. If the walls of Fort Myer chapels could speak, not only would they echo the prayers of the people, but something of the very heart and soul of a nation. The chaplain in this place must be in vital touch with that historical voice and with the rich national traditions and diverse cultural heritages it represents.

As in any pulpit, the chaplain's effectiveness at Fort Myer depends in large measure on the degree to which he acknowledges these historical roots. The chaplain does indeed stand on the shoulders of those who've gone before, or else he becomes an offense to the very people to whom he seeks to minister when he trudges on in indifference to the heritage and labors which have been sacrificially passed on to him. Every sermon preached is inevitably delivered within the context and judgment of this rich history.<sup>5</sup>

## Perspectives of the People

The people of the Fort Myer Protestant community have adopted the following mission statement:

To be a faith community dedicated to grateful, loving service to Jesus Christ, to one another, and to the people outside the faith community, intending to enable persons and groups to participate in a spiritual journey by offering opportunities to grow in Christ.

They emphasize liturgical worship and understand it to be the work of the people of God in magnifying the worth of God. They see themselves as laborers, together with the chaplains, working for the accomplishment of a common mission—"bringing God to people and people to God."

One identifying characteristic of Fort Myer is the extremely large retirement community which uses the post facilities and worships in its chapels. The presence of a large number of retired persons in the Fort Myer Memorial Chapel helps lend a "home church" feeling to the military chapel, and demands and deserves the chaplain's special pastoral and homiletical attention. As one retired soldier, active in the Fort Myer congregation, has written, "When these people turn to a military chaplain for help and advice, rather than to a civilian minister . . . they are above average in their intelligence because of their academic backgrounds, travel, and experience." The retired community challenges and motivates the preacher to call forth the best of his "abilities, skills, and knowledge to maintain their interest and attention."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Brooks, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>John W. MacInDoe, CO1 (USA, ret.), "The Chapel Program and the Retired Community," *Military Chaplains' Review* (Fall 1977), pp. 70-71.

The Protestant worship community at Fort Myer has a long and honored tradition of rich sacred music, creative liturgy, and inspired preaching. However preaching is but one aspect of liturgy—scripture, prayers, rituals, music and preaching work together to constitute the total celebration of worship. Preaching complements the total worship experience, rather than standing apart from it. While striving for this unity of worship, I have learned to value the common scriptural references found in the lectionary. As a Southern Baptist clergyman, whose background, education, and training has been predominantly non-liturgical, I appreciate the thematic advantages of the ecumenical lectionary, not as an imposed ironclad schedule, but as a tool for enabling worship leaders to plan services which are timely, solidly biblical, and liturgically unified.

At Fort Myer the proclamation of the Word of God from the pulpit is enhanced each Sunday by a carefully balanced and sensitively designed liturgy, and it is supported by the finest choral, instrumental, and often orchestral music. While the preacher is uplifted and thrilled by the worship setting, he is all the more compelled to aim for preaching that is biblically sound, intellectually stimulating, spiritually nurturing, and in keeping with the high expectations of the people whom he serves.

In *Prescription for Preaching*, Woodrow Michael Kroll insists “there is absolutely no limit to the number of people who can stay away from poor preaching.”<sup>7</sup> People come to church expecting to be fed. Like it or not, the only spiritual food some people receive is received in church on Sunday morning. They come expecting to receive the equivalent of twenty-one fully prepared spiritual meals, a full week’s ration, all wrapped up in one twenty minute sermon—enough, they suppose, to get them through another week. As unrealistic as that may seem, it should motivate those of us who have the responsibility of preaching to take our task seriously.

Erwin McDonald, former editor of the “Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine,” tells how one parish called a new preacher. The rural community had the reputation for not keeping its ministers for more than three or four months. Finally the district superintendent sent a young preacher who, unlike the others, was on the job for more than two years. Curious to know the reason, the superintendent asked a member of the congregation how that had come to be. “If you insist, I’ll tell you,” the church member replied. “We folks out here really don’t want a preacher at all, and this pastor comes the closest to it of any we have ever had!” It’s a funny story and probably misrepresents the truth. The truth is that people are earnestly seeking superior preaching, and they are understandably disheartened when they come

<sup>7</sup>Woodrow Michael Kroll, *Prescription for Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 143.



to church, expecting to feast on the strong meat of the Word, to be given instead pabulum, the warmed-over drivel from someone else's "simple sermons." Kroll hits the mark when he writes, "Preaching is not outmoded, just underachieved."<sup>8</sup>

## Pointers for the Chaplain-Preacher

Obviously, there is no exclusive way to preach the gospel. Homiletic style and technique must be in keeping with one's own personality and gifts. However, several qualities of sound and effective preaching appear to be constant and perhaps universally applicable.

Biblical authority is first. Parishioners want to hear a word from the Lord when they come to church on the Lord's day. Lloyd Perry and Faris Whitesell in *Variety in Your Preaching* insist that "all preaching should be biblical, the Word of God its fountain source." They further assert that "no other preaching is worthy of the time and effort of God's spokesmen."<sup>9</sup>

At Fort Myer, the preacher never knows who may be in the pews for the service. In the words of a local television spot, we are located near the most important house, in the most important city, in the most important country in the world. Our chapels are attended by the nation's senior military leaders, by diplomats from our nation and others, by members of the Congress, White House staffers, corporate executives, and some who, because of their service to the nation, have become legends in their time. Our people guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers, entertain at state dinners, staff the Pentagon, and provide key support for Presidential inaugurations and other ceremonies of national and international significance. They are soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. They are generals and privates, active and retired, newcomer and seasoned veterans. Their diversity defies the stereotypical profile. It is, therefore, always safe to assume that the worship community at Fort Myer will include advisers in national and international affairs, representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, experts in hightech communications and electronics, and members of Washington's famous "think tanks." No chaplain could be expected to be competent in their several areas of expertise; they come to church looking to the chaplain-preacher as the bearer of spiritual truth. It is an important and sacred honor to have access to their minds and hearts for that brief period each week. Steadman Nelson, LTC (USA ret), a member of the protestant parish council, has observed, "In an area of such important opinion and decision makers, the influence of a chaplain-preacher whose spiritual

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup>Lloyd M. Perry and Faris D. Whitesell, *Variety in Your Preaching* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1954), p. 32.

leadership is firmly based on the risen Lord cannot be overestimated.”

Careful sermon preparation is the second quality demanded of the preacher at Fort Myer. A zealous seminary student once announced that he had made no preparation for the classroom homily. He claimed he was entirely dependent on the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The professor advised the young student that the Holy Spirit had best lead him to the library or he might well flunk the course. There is no substitute for adequate sermon preparation. Thorough exegesis, the development of a living repertory of apt sermon illustrations, consistently relevant application —not one of these elements, each critical to good preaching, comes without intense and regular study.

The third quality of preaching demanded by this place is brevity. It is said that shortly after George S. Patton became the commander at Fort Myer in December of 1938, he called in the post chaplain and instructed him to cut his sermons to the bone. “‘I don’t yield to any man in my reverence of the Lord,’ he said, ‘but no sermon needs to take longer than ten minutes. I’m sure you can make your point in that time.’” The next Sunday, with spurs clinking, he strutted down the aisle and took his seat in the front pew facing the padre. As soon as the sermon began, Patton took out his watch. After eight minutes, he looked up to the chaplain with a portentous glance. Two minutes later the sermon ended on the dot.”<sup>10</sup> At Fort Myer, with seven services squeezed into two chapels every Sunday morning, time is critical. I’ve found that with adequate preparation, some practice, and with considerable self-discipline, the fifteen to twenty minute sermon is well within reach. My sister insists she has never heard a “short, bad sermon.” Most parishioners would agree. The sermon must be short and clear to succeed in this place.

Speaking at the 1982 National Ecumenical Symposium of Preaching in Atlanta, Raymond E. Brown, Professor of Scripture at Union Theological Seminary, said, “The first preachers were not people who merely repeated what Jesus taught. They were people who thought about what he meant.” In sermon application the preacher is in dialogue with the congregation; he thinks about what Jesus meant and what, in turn, his message means for us today. Chaplain (COL) Francis Keefe, currently Fort Myer’s post chaplain, calls this “keeping people aware of God.” In Washington, it requires keeping up and understanding developments on the political, military, and diplomatic fronts. As everywhere, it means being in touch with moral and ethical tensions, human hurt, family tensions, and with genuine spirituality as it bears on each of these concerns.

<sup>10</sup>Ladislav Forago, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph* (New York: Ivan Obdensky, Inc., 1963), pp. 133–134.



Clarity is the final quality enforced by the unique environment of Fort Myer. Clarity is hindered or enhanced by a number of factors: the preacher's choice of words, body language, sermon construction, diction and grammar, and even environmental factors such as the quality of the public address system. The size, configuration, and acoustical properties of Fort Myer's Memorial Chapel, along with the great diversity of worshippers, tend to make the element of clarity the most difficult to achieve. Sometimes, in spite of nothing less than heroic efforts, both preacher and people are frustrated by the lack of clarity. Plainly, if the vehicle of the preacher's message is the spoken word, the words must be heard and understood to be effective.

## **Pitfalls in Preaching—A Testimonial**

There are pitfalls for the preacher. I've fallen into many of them, and from my painful experiences, let me offer some advice. Although these are altogether personal, I share them with the hope that they will serve other pilgrims on this way.

Don't preach to impress. If you wish to be impressive, it is likely that you will impress no one so much as you will impress yourself. Work to be authentic.

Avoid "pickle barrel" sermons. Without a lot of warming up, the sermons will taste like yesterday's leftovers. The stale sermon is no better than stale bread.

Never delegate the responsibility of the pulpit. The chaplain-preacher—not the people, musicians, worship committee, commander, guest speaker, or anyone else—must accept responsibility for the message proclaimed. Avoid statements of attribution without adequate documentation or the expressed approval of the person being quoted.

Don't use the pulpit as a sounding board for your own personal doubts or personal problems. The Word of God—not the preacher's personal agenda—deserves to be central.

Don't preach "off the cuff." Preach from the depth of your study, relationships, prayers, faith experiences, and discipleship.

Avoid dress and mannerisms which call attention to themselves. For those who prefer not to wear vestments or the uniform, tasteful and appropriate attire is required.

Don't impose the homiletic style, which was thought to have been effective at the last post, as supposedly effective in your present assignment. Styles and methods change with the people and the environment.

Don't be overly conscious of rank. While the chaplain must be sensitive to the military structure in which he serves and ministers, most parishioners will relate to the chaplain as pastor—not as one holding a position on a wiring diagram.

Avoid becoming a one-person show. Take advantage of the resources of good preachers in your area. Expose your people to a rich and wide variety of contemporary preaching.

There is no more fitting challenge for the preacher at Fort Myer—or for the preacher in any pulpit—than the words of St. Paul addressed to a young preacher some time ago.

Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*The Bible*, Revised Standard Version (National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1980).

# Preaching the Prophets: A Suggested Methodology

Chaplain (Major) William L. Hufham

Preaching the Old Testament prophets offers the preacher unique challenges. The message of the prophet for his day becomes the message for our day only after the careful creative work of the preacher has been done. The preacher's creative effort is critical at three points. First there must be the discovery, through careful exegesis, of what the prophet said to his own historical age. Second, the application of this message must be made to speak to the circumstances of the present. Third, and most difficult, there must be the casting and placing of this message within the perspective of the Christian revelation: the prophetic message reshaped, as it must be, by a Christian theological understanding.

## I. Text to Sermon

For non-liturgical preachers, the first step in preaching the prophets is to choose the text. Years of text-hunting has proved it to be, at least for me, a most difficult task. Although those who use the lectionary for their scripture readings do not search for a text in this way, they often deal with the prophetic literature as one of the appointed readings. In either case there are two prerequisites when dealing with a



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prophetic text: a thorough knowledge of the prophets, and a close association with the people to whom you preach.

The prophets spoke in the historical context of their day. The message was incisive, inspired and relevant. They spoke for God to the people, and they spoke with God for the people. They were bridges between two estranged parties—God and man—intercessors between the creator and his creatures. Their words were bold, poetic, and often cryptic. Their messages were timely and creative; their images were always vivid.

This article outlines my method for preaching from a prophetic text. Since I am not currently on a preaching assignment, I will define an imaginary congregation. The sermon is to be prepared for preaching in a military chapel setting, to a multi-faith, multi-cultural, officer and enlisted, family and single, male and female congregation.

I have chosen *Isaiah* 55 as the text for this sermon. In this passage Isaiah speaks to universal elements of the human condition with which each of us can identify: exile and estrangement, hunger and thirst, God's goodness over against our smallness, our desiring revitalizing and God's constant invitation to us. These elements came to mind when I first meditated on the passage; but at first reading, the clear link between audience and message was not established. It came into focus for me only when I looked at my own condition.

I am always spiritually hungry and thirsty; I am seldom filled or satisfied with the things of this life. I believe in the greatness of God, but too seldom trust in Him. I hear and proclaim his invitation Sunday after Sunday, but see too few fruits of renewal and vitality in my own life. My exile is self-imposed, and my return is self-delayed.

At this point in the sermon preparation, I have done no scholarly research on the passage. I have only read the chapter several times and jotted down some of the key ideas that come to me as I reflect on the English text. I usually do my devotional, meditative reading of the scriptures in a modern English translation. I like the *New International Version* because with it I avoid the problem of retranslating an older version into modern English. My preliminary notes look like this:

- vss. 1–5 — thirst/poverty/hunger = the frailty of the human condition
- not only speaking of physical needs
- spiritual needs/soul needs—may be more important to our survival

- vss. 6–13 — God is near/can be distant  
 — man creates the distance between himself  
 and his Maker by evil acts  
 — The Divine bridge is built = God's Word  
 — Joy and peace—source in God  
 — Everlasting sign = renewal/revitalizing  
 — imagery: nature transforms  
     thorns and briar change  
     to pines and myrtles  
     the earth rejoices

Note: In the chapter, the writer uses a striking series of imperatives: come, buy, listen, give ear, see, seek, forsake, and turn.

This step is important because it allows me to identify with the message of the prophet. Unless the prophet speaks to me directly, I will have difficulty speaking the prophet's message to others. When I have overlooked this step and gone directly to the commentaries, I have produced less than my best sermon.

My next step is to go outside the chapter, looking at the larger message of this section of *Isaiah*. I make notes as I read from *Isaiah* 40-55, a major division of the prophet's writing. These notes follow the key themes that I hear in the prophet.

- God is great and compassionate/man is small, insignificant by comparison
- Idolatry is foolishness—a significant part of this section is devoted to the idol-maker. Idolatry must have been an important problem for the community in exile.
- Strength comes from God/counters human weakness
- Servant passages—who is servant? Israel, prophet, another person, an ideal? Israel—called by God chosen for mission, “Light to the Nations.” Defining who the Servant is may be the key to understanding the message.
- Court room scenes: God vs. Man, nature judges. The role of nature is important in judging between God and man.
- Emphasis on “New”—change is coming, new song, new thing happening. New Land.
- God = “I am . . .” First and last, the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, the Creator, Maker of heaven and the earth, the only god, “I am the Lord, there is no other Lord.”



- Israel will be restored, but how? What will constitute the new Israel?
- The oppressor will be destroyed

*Isaiah 55* is the capstone for the section *Isaiah 40-55*. It captures the key themes from the preceding chapters and sums up God's activity with Israel—his people in exile. As Isaiah speaks for God to the people they are enduring the third in a series of oppressive captivities: Egyptian, Assyrian, and Babylonian. (*Isaiah 48:20, 52:4*)

The message of *Isaiah 55*, in context, now begins to emerge. A captive people, clinging to the God of their history, will be redeemed and reestablished. The central message is Hope. The human condition is not hopeless. God does not abandon his people. The chasm between God and man will be bridged by God himself. God's word is the divine bridge. (*Isaiah 55:10*)

The process of transition from this central message to the sermon outline is one of the creative moments for the preacher. How does the modern prophet present the ancient prophet's message to our people today? Where is the link between a people in exile in Babylon and people in America today? More specifically, where is the link between the ancient people and my military congregation? I look back over my random notes to see which themes relate directly to the human condition today as I know it. Some connections seem clear; *e.g.*, false gods, thirst, hunger, poverty of the spirit, and the need for renewal and revival. I begin to sketch some tentative outlines at this point:

#### A. "Homecoming" *Isaiah 55*

Intro: Looking at visits to our homes. Where is home for the soldier?

I. Soul-thirst and spiritual hunger

II. Divine invitation

III. Break with the past

IV. Success in the Kingdom of God

Conclusion: Peace and joy = divine counters to hunger and thirst.

#### B. "The Divine Bridge" *Isaiah 55:8-11*

I. Distance between God and man (8-9)

II. God's Word bridges the gap (10-11a)

III. Mission accomplished (11b)

C. "Hunger and Thirst for God" (Communion) Isaiah 55:1-3

I. Human condition—hunger and thirst

II. Divine offer—food for the soul

III. Cost: It's free!

Conclusion: Soul food from God

D. "Food for Hungry Souls"

I. Separation

II. Invitation

III. Restoration and Transformation

## II. Exegetical Research

Next I begin my exegetical work with favorite commentaries. *The Interpreter's Bible* is handy because of its scope and quality. It gives two perspectives on every text—exegetical and expository. The two complement each other. The exegetical work clarifies and enhances the exposition of the text. *The Second Isaiah* by C. R. North is one of many scholarly works readily available which deal with this biblical material.

- The prophet is heir to the three primary Old Testament traditions—Exodus, David, and Zion. Isaiah emphasizes Exodus/Zion and diminishes the Davidic Covenant. The new covenant is transferred to the servant. A non-Israelite, Cyrus, is called "his messiah" (*Is.* 45:1), but this does not have the weight of a Davidic messianic fulfillment. Cyrus is Yahweh's tool for deliverance, just as an Assyrian was the instrument of divine wrath.
- Theological emphases in *Isaiah* 40-55: Yahweh-Creator; Yahweh, the only God; the new salvation; Zion restored; the Suffering Servant.
- *Isaiah* 55:1-3 = Old Testament equivalent to the parable of the Great Supper (*Luke* 14:15-24). Water sold in the streets of the Near East. By contrast, God offers spiritual food and drink without cost.
- Exegetical problem: "everlasting covenant" with David (2 *Samuel* 7, Ps 89) seems to be transferred to the reestablished Israel or to the Servant. Are these the same?
- North divides the chapter into two parts: Vss. 1-5 Invitation, and Vss. 6-13 Homecoming.

- The prophet speaks for God in this chapter. Like a herald on the streets, calling on the name of his master, he speaks the words of the master.
- v. 4—David as “witness” and “leader”—Israel has a spiritual calling to be a witness for God (*Is.* 43:10, 44:8). “Leader” and “commander” suggest moral leadership rather than political and military hegemony (North).
- vss. 6–7—Prayer replaced sacrifice for the community in exile. Without a temple, worship had to be altered significantly. Turning away from wickedness preceded God’s grace. God freely pardon after the wicked turn from their ways.
- vss. 8–9—Distance between God and Man. God’s ways and thoughts are infinitely superior to man’s.
- v. 11—The power of the word spoken. Even human words, oaths, curses, blessings have power. God’s Word is irrevocable. It will not be unfruitful (empty).
- v. 12–13 The return of the exiles will evoke joy and peace for the people of God. Nature will rejoice and be transformed. This transformation will be a permanent sign for the people.

### III. Sermon: “Food for Hungry Souls”

#### Introduction

I have never been hungry. Not really hungry. I have missed a meal or two. I have been down to my last C-ration in the field, but always some generous soldier has had compassion on me and bailed me out with a can of unwanted fruit cake or beans and franks.

I have never been really thirsty. I have experienced that dry mouth that comes after a long run. And after running a marathon, I have even thought I would never be filled with enough water again. But the dryness passed. My thirst was quenched. I have never been really thirsty.

But what if the thirst could not pass? What if the thirst would not go away, and no amount of liquid would assuage that thirst? What if the hunger could not be sated, the thirst could not be slaked with all the food and water imaginable? What if I were doomed to a death of thirst? or hunger?

The poet/songwriter Harry Chapin wrote a song a few years ago describing three days in an African child’s life. He called it “The Shortest Story.”



I am born today.  
Sun burns a promise in my eyes.  
Mama strikes me and I draw a breath and cry.  
Above me a cloud tumbles softly through the sky.  
I am glad to be alive.

It is my seventh day.  
I taste the hunger and I cry.  
My brother and sister cling to mama's side.

She squeezes her breast, but it has nothing  
to provide.  
Someone weeps. I fall asleep.

It is twenty days today.  
Mama does not hold me any more.  
I open my mouth, but I am too weak to cry  
Above me a bird slowly crawls across the sky.  
Why is there nothing now to do but die.<sup>1</sup>

The song was not a hit. Songs that make us squirm don't make it to the top ten. We live in a hungry world. The starving millions of Chad, Ethiopia, and Angola are all too real, but they are also visible reminders of something else . . . something that may be worse and something that may be much closer to us all. They are reminders of the millions whose bodies are well fed but whose souls are parched, whose spirit are withered by a spiritual hunger and whose souls are separated from the source of living water. Who are those millions? We are.

### **I—Separation: "My ways are not your ways."**

Isaiah's people are exiled from their homeland. Their religious practice is cut off from its past and severely altered. The psalmist bemoans their estangement from God:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down  
and wept when we remembered Zion.  
There on the poplars we hung our harps . . . (*Psalm*137)

No more music came from these estranged people. The days of glory were gone. The kingdom of David and Solomon became a distant and dim memory; God's people could only reminisce, reminding each other of how it use to be, trying to keep alive their ancient faith in a faithful God.

How can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?

<sup>1</sup>"The Shortest Story" by Harry Chapin, "Greatest Stories Live," Electra/Asylum/Nonesuch Records, 1976.

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand  
wither . . . (*Psalms* 137)

What had brought them to that place? What had gone wrong? They had been faithful to the Law. They had performed the required practices, broken down the altars of Baal . . . cleaned up their act, so to speak. But the rising forces of change had overwhelmed them. Assyria and Babylonia had gained world power and had left a diminishing Israel in the lurch. History itself had overtaken Israel.

In exile some began to drift away from the faith. Their tormentors were too cruel. "Sing us a song of Zion," the tormentors demanded. "Tell us tales of David and Goliath, the ones about Samson and Delilah. Quote us some of your prophets."

During the exile some of the prisoners turned to the local gods, the idols of Babylon. "When in Babylon . . ." Not much remained of the symbols of their faith, except their stories and prayers, their songs and customs.

So much of the practice of their faith had been tied to the sacrifice-forgiveness cycles of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some of their practices flirted dangerously close to the pagan god Baal. After all, the Babylonian gods were close, visible, and present. Yahweh was distant and remote. The Babylonian gods could be touched, felt, even polished. Yahweh, the God of Israel, was out there somewhere, hidden, a spirit in the hills or desert, back there in Zion, on his holy hill . . . whatever remained of it. (From the pictures in Lamentations, not much remained.)

"Why do you labor for what does not satisfy?" Isaiah's question could be put to every age. It's a pattern we set very early in life.

My first Daisy BB rifle was the first object I can remember earning real money to buy, back in 1948. I worked cutting lawns, earning one dollar for each lawn, and spending 27 cents for a gallon of gas to burn in my dad's new power mower, until I had earned \$7.95 to pay for the rifle. Mom's warning still echoes, "Be careful you don't shoot somebody's eye out." On my first hunting expedition, stalking the wary sparrow, I stumbled onto the greatest trophy a BB hunter could find—a bluejay. I lost my cool. I cocked the rifle and fired three times. For those who have never fired a Daisy BB, it has a lever that pulls away from the stock which should be closed before pulling the trigger. Each time I fired I forgot to close the cocking lever. It closed by itself. Three times. The third time, it broke my middle finger between the second and third joint.

"Why do you labor for what does not satisfy?"

The play "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" features two slightly inept characters from Shakespeare's "Hamlet" who are caught in a self-designed trap. Hamlet, knowing their inability to admit that they have been foiled, sends them off to England with a slightly changed message which will bring about their execution. They

know what the message says; but if they don't deliver it, they will lose face for having been tricked by Hamlet. They are trapped on a ship moving inexorably toward their doom, caught in their own foolish weakness and false-pride.

"Why do you labor for what does not satisfy?"

Separation from God comes in many forms. It can be a physical exile, a foolish trap, or a quest for "that which does not satisfy." It comes frequently when we begin to fall into thinking that we are self-sufficient.

"Right now I don't need God. Maybe later, when the kids come along. Right now, I am too busy to bother with all that holy Joe stuff."

## **II—Invitation: "Come to the water and drink."**

God's word and call to a weary people is full of compassion and hope.

Come, all you who are thirsty,  
Come to the water. (*Isaiah 55:1*)

Jesus makes the same offer to his followers seven centuries later.

Come, all who are weary and heavy laden  
And I will give you rest. (*Matthew 11:28*)

If the human condition is estrangement, the divine offer is fellowship with God. But for some it comes at unexpected moments.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water at noon from Jacob's well. A Jew, sitting by the well, asked her to draw some water for him. She questioned the propriety of the request. Who had ever heard of a Jew asking water from a Samaritan? He offered her living water that would assuage her thirst forever. She laughed. He didn't even have a bucket. He went on to tell her more about herself than she cared to remember—wife of five husbands, presently living with a man by arrangement. Each time she tried to sidestep his assertion, he brought her back to the point. Finally, she opened the way: "Sir, they say Messiah will come . . ."

"I who speak to you am he."

Who was she? Unnamed, unknown, unimportant. Only a Samaritan. Only a woman. But to this insignificant bit of God's humanity, Jesus offered himself.

"Come to the water and drink."

His invitation was often issued to unusual people. Zachaeus, outcast of his own people, climbed a tree to see this stranger, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus called him down and brought salvation to his household. A blind man cries out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on



me!" A gentile woman comes begging scraps from his table. On and on the litany of humanity is called forth to the well of living water.

### III. Restoration: "I will bring you back."

It takes some work to bring a thing back to life. The exiled people of Israel had lost their spirit. To give them life again was no small thing—to give us life again is no small thing. We learn this profound truth in the simplest of things. It may be easier to make something from nothing than to restore the faded, the worn-out, or the discarded. Certainly its true of furniture.

Building a piece of furniture from scratch is easy. New wood. A pattern. Some measurements. A few cuts. Some glue, a few screws, some sanding, and it is ready to paint. Not so easy with an old piece of furniture. There are dents and mars, the tangible evidence of the ravages of the ages. A gash made when a child's tricycle wheeled too close. The circle mark made by a glass of cold tea—or was it hot coffee? The worm holes, or are those the marks of a careless and inquisitive child, wielding a hammer and nail, trying to be a carpenter like his dad. The old piece must be repaired, reglued, stripped naked before restoration can begin.

Scraping, rubbing with steel wool, restoring life to the old piece. What emerges from the effort is more than a piece of furniture—it is a revived piece of family history. The marks are gone. The wood is renewed and glows with a lustre that could not be produced in a new piece. The restored is special—a family treasure with a history and character.

Isaiah knew this truth: "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back." (*Isaiah* 54:7) The people of Israel had faded from history. In Babylon they were a non-people—no land, no temple, no king—bearing the scars of defeat and exile. Their last memories of glory vanished when their pathetic king Zedekiah was led as a captive before the king of the Babylonians. His sons were killed before his eyes, and then those royal eyes, which had witnessed this tragedy, were themselves put out (*2 Kings* 25). It was a terrible moment and terrible memory.

The people in exile asked why a thousand times, but for decades no answer came.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways."

But for some the power of God's word to effect change was not lost. It was seen and remembered even in the subtle transformations of nature. Thorns turn to pines, briars turn to myrtle. For the captive in Babylon this image must have brought back vivid memories of the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The dramatic contrast between the barrenness of the wilderness, the roadway for their long trek home, and the rich fertile valleys that punctuate the

land of Israel must have been evoked when Isaiah spoke these words. (*Isaiah* 55:12-13)

“My ways are not your ways” and maybe we should add reverently, “Thank God.” Whenever we confuse the two, what comes out is something less, a cheap and tawdry commercial imitation. We manufacture something phony and plastic, not even a reasonable facsimile of God’s ways. It should bear the label: “Made by Human-kind—Consumption Hazardous To Your Health.”

As the lyrical message of Isaiah has it, God’s ways are higher—as high as the heavens are above the earth, as far as the East is from the West. It’s the difference between the purity and power of God’s love and something less—our human capacity to love one another even as we love ourselves.

On the backs of his prophets God lays the burden, the mantle of responsibility for bridging the gap between His ways and our ways. The purpose of the prophetic message is to move man’s ways back to God’s. Our efforts seem too often to be the reverse: trying to make God palatable to modern man. We strip the cross of its scandal, remove the offense of the Gospel, and produce pap—little more than humanistic tripe with a flavoring of the divine. The Gospel—the purity of God’s love—is strong stuff.

It’s not gospel unless it strikes at the core of man’s hunger and thirst. The gospel is: God loves you. It’s not gospel unless it offends and affronts our comfortable ways. The Gospel is: Love God and love your neighbor. It’s not gospel unless it takes up a cross and drags it down a long dusty road to Calvary with hecklers shouting abuse and making sport along the way. The Gospel is: Follow me. To us—to a world separated, even in self-imposed exile, the strong word of God comes as neither a tranquilizing drug, the saving institution, or a human success story. It comes as truth, invitation and promise.

“My ways are not your ways.”

“Come to the water and drink.”

“I will bring you back,” says the Lord.

## The Army Pulpit From One Perspective

Chaplain (Major) Bruce L. Burslie

Army chaplains can't preach! This is a perception held by many army chapel worshipers and even by Army chaplains themselves. The perception, Army chaplains can't preach, is a misperception. Few people listen to as many sermons by Army chaplains as I do. I also listen to many sermons in civilian churches. I find it difficult to say civilian preaching is better. There are excellent preachers in civilian pulpits and there are excellent preachers in military pulpits.

As the homiletics instructor at the United States Army Chaplain Center and School, I frequently hear the criticism, "Why is preaching by Army chaplains so poor"? And I always want to ask, "What do you mean by poor preaching"? The problem may not be homiletical at all. Poor preaching for many people simply means preaching in an unfamiliar style or preaching which is different from the way it was done "back home." Could the criticism of poor pulpit work by Army chaplains be a product of unrealistic expectations on the listener's part?

Six theological claims which could be expected of true preaching were agreed upon by a group representing a broad range of denominations.

1. True preaching is "a form" of the Word of God.
2. True preaching is biblical. The Bible story is for today; and it becomes our own story.
3. True preaching centers upon Jesus Christ as God's redemptive act for broken humanity.



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4. True preaching is in itself a part of the divine redemptive event.

5. True preaching contains a message that is in collision with the culture.

6. True preaching is a unique kind of speech where perceptions are changed.\*

If military chaplains keep these generally accepted theological claims in mind, preaching will be on the mark and the perception, chaplains can't preach, is likely to change. When the worshiper believes the preacher is being true to the text and preaching the "Word of God," the issue of preaching style is seldom raised.

A basic question to ask of preaching in a military environment is: Whose needs are being met? Military worship communities are distinct from civilian worship communities because they are comprised of people from such different religious backgrounds. Moreover each military congregation is constantly shifting, with the constant arrival and departure of personnel. At times the military congregation may have a majority of members from the free church tradition, and at other times the congregation may have a majority of members from a liturgical tradition. It is very important for the chaplain to know his audience.

The chaplain must always remain true to denominational expectations and to personal beliefs. On the other hand, the chaplain must always remain sensitive to the religious needs of the worshiping community. It is possible to meet the needs of a military congregation and remain true to one's own traditions. There is so much biblical material shared by all traditions that doctrinal differences need not be the focal point of worship or preaching.

It is possible for chaplains from different religious traditions to have a vital and mutually enriching ministry. These successful shared ministries have one thing in common; the chapel ministry is seen by the military congregation as a team effort. The chaplains are seen as working together for the glory of God and doing what is best for the community. Sharing a chapel should mean more than having a different one-chaplain show every Sunday. Chaplains should work to be seen as a worship team with all chaplains participating in worship responsibilities. Planning and coordination of the worship are very important and the results are worth the effort.

What can we do to change the misperception, chaplains can't preach? An old saying I use for the theme of the homiletics classes at the Chaplain School is: "You can't sell from an empty wagon." As chaplains we have little else to offer besides our spirituality. If our

\*Grady Davis, "The Teaching of Homiletics—The Present Situation in American Seminaries," *Encounter XXIII* (Spring 1961) 3.

spiritual wagons are empty, where will those we minister to find spiritual renewal? Ours is a unique profession, and it demands unique resources. If we wish to become better preachers, then we will try to fill our wagons with as many homiletical tools and skills as possible. There are many excellent homiletics workshops and seminars available. There is also an abundance of homiletical materials available in the form of video-tapes, audio-tapes, books, periodicals, and preaching aids. Some chaplains have formed weekly sermon preparation study groups. There is no lack of resources, and there should be no lack of support to fill our wagons.

One of the problems for busy chaplains has always been the issue of time available for adequate sermon preparation. Time, however, is a commodity which we prioritize. If we are serious about good pulpit work, then we will make it a time priority. It is certainly possible to take as little as an hour per week. We should let people know we are studying and do not wish to be disturbed. If we honor our preparation time, others will honor it too.

It is possible to improve our military pulpits just by giving preaching more emphasis. If supervisory chaplains show interest in the quality of their subordinate chaplains' preaching and provide guidance and resources, the subordinate chaplains will show greater interest and sermons will improve.

Why can't chaplains preach? We can and we do. Preaching in a military environment offers unique challenges and opportunities. By filling our wagons and consciously making preaching one of our top priorities, it may one day be said, "Those chaplains can preach!"

## Interpreting Biblical Metaphors

David M. Park, Ch., Major, USAF

As a general rule, biblical metaphors are thought of as comparisons between two or more words, sentences, or ideas in which one of the referents is described in terms of another. The metaphorical elements in combination with each other evoke meaning by the transfer of the characteristics of one element to that of its coordinate. Meaning generally can be reduced to equivalent literal statements on the basis of analogy. The meaning of some metaphors, however, cannot be determined completely this way. For example, the statement, "God is love," (*I John* 4:8) initially may appear easy to exegete, but upon closer examination, some of the meaning conveyed through the metaphor appears to elude definition. Volumes have been written to explain the comparison between God and love, and yet fresh insight remains to be discovered. The full meaning expressed through the image simply lies beyond the parameter of conventional language structure. As the apostle Paul wrote, "Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out!" (*Romans* 11:33)

The business of understanding Biblical metaphors is further complicated by their often being charged with emotional content. They are regarded as useful literary devices whose function is to express meaning or insight which ordinary language is incapable of transmitting. Consequently, textual images are thought of as more than mere signs. They are perceived as bearers of the reality to which



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they refer. As conduits of thought, their vitality transcends time, challenging the imagination and perception of the interpreter.

Thus, one of the tasks confronted by students of Holy Scripture is the development and application of effectual principles for exegeting biblical metaphors. Lucid emanation of meaning from canonical metaphors seems to occur innately only with a limited number of figures. The objective of this article, therefore, is to establish principles which will aid in delineating the meaning of biblical metaphors from both the standpoint of the pictures they project as well as the meanings they convey. The following discussion emphasizes seven criteria guiding interpretation of metaphors in the Bible.

The identification of metaphors is the first concern for the interpreter of biblical images. Recognition of textual figures is not as easy as it might seem.<sup>1</sup> Awareness of the transition of "lively" metaphors to "dead" ones is required for proper identification of the two forms. Metaphors are considered "dead" when they lose their psychological surprise and grammatical absurdity. "Lively" metaphors, on the other hand, are figures which retain their shock effect.<sup>2</sup> Paul's reference to his "thorn in the flesh," or more graphically, his "stake in the flesh," is a "lively" metaphor, the imagery of which jolts the mind of today's interpreter.

A common error which occurs in analyzing ancient literature is mistaking "dead" metaphors for "lively" metaphors<sup>3</sup> The prolonged use of phrases and the free association of words and ideas combine to produce uncertainty in distinguishing between these components of grammar.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>G. E. Yoos, "A Phenomenological Look at Metaphor," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 32 (1971), 83-84.

<sup>2</sup>J. C. Condon, *Semantics and Communication* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 46; E. R. MacCormac, "Metaphor Revisited," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art* 30 (1971) 239-50; and C. M. Turbayne, *The Myth of Metaphor* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1970) 24. MacCormac ("Metaphor Revisited," 246) writes that although new metaphors tend to deny paraphrase, they do succeed in suggesting novel perceptions or shades of meaning. MacCormac goes on to state, however, that some metaphors indefinitely defy reduction to ordinary language.

<sup>3</sup>M. J. A. Breal (*Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning* [London: William Heinemann, 1900] 131) observes that "it is difficult to recognize the most ancient metaphors . . . [because] the state of things which suggested them has disappeared." According to S. J. Brown (*The World of Imagery* [New York: Russell and Russell, 1966] 252-53) "one of the most frequent causes of departure from orthodoxy has at all times been the taking of some metaphorical expression for a literal statement of fact or at least the working out of a legitimate metaphor into details which formed no part of the underlying analogy which gave rise to it." See also C. H. Dodd, "Some Problems of New Testament Translation," *ExpTim* 72 (1961) 269.

<sup>4</sup>Turbayne, *The Myth of Metaphor*, 26-27.

One feature serving as a clue to the interpreter to indicate that he is faced with a metaphor, and not with a symbol, is the paradoxical effect produced by juxtaposed words. When an expression read literally seems absurd, the construction should be interpreted figuratively.<sup>5</sup> Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth." (*Matthew* 5:13) Although his statement may appear distorted, it obviously is distorted with an achievable purpose.<sup>6</sup> The comparison between "you" and "salt," however, when read literally, is nonsensical and demands exegesis according to norms established for figurative forms.

As a general rule, metaphorical constructions in the Bible ought to be explicated on the basis of analogy.<sup>7</sup> According to this principle, the points of similarity and dissimilarity between the metaphorical referents are listed. For the metaphor to be effective, the points of similarity should outnumber the dissimilar ones. Meaning is acquired after the significant aspects of the analogy have been enumerated.<sup>8</sup> Note A. B. Mickelsen's (*Interpreting the Bible* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963] 235, 307) discussion of allegory and literal figurative elements in which he opts for the analogical principle of interpretation. Figure One illustrates this analogical principle of interpretation.

The diagram shows that each of the juxtaposed terms produces a number of connotations. Some of the characteristics evoked by the metaphorical referents cancel each other. In order to make explicit the intention of the metaphor, the features which complement each other are combined in an orderly sequence and expressed in a concise statement.<sup>10</sup>

Recognizing that scriptural metaphors generally require interpretation based on analogy, some of the figures, at least to a limited degree, may defy explication. When reduction of metaphors cannot be made satisfactorily by application of the analogical principal, the best approach is to view the metaphor much as one would look

<sup>5</sup>L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950) 85; and L. Perrine, *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry*, 2d ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963) 53.

<sup>6</sup>C. M. Myers, "Metaphors and Mediatly Informative Expressions," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1968) 159.

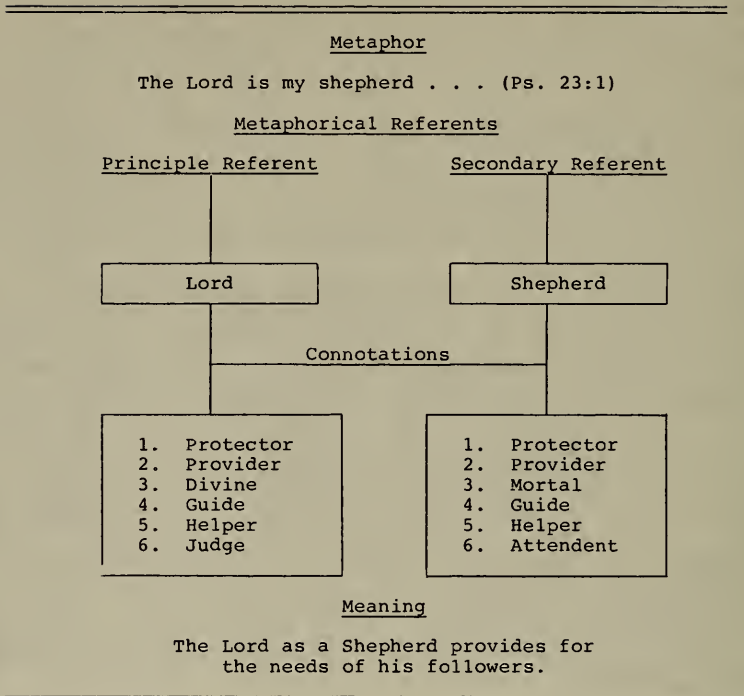
<sup>7</sup>Cf. Aristotle *Poetics* 21. 1457<sup>b</sup>21. 5–30; *Rhetoric* 3. 1411<sup>a</sup> 3–1412<sup>a</sup>3. 18; 1412<sup>b</sup>3. 33–1413<sup>a</sup>3. 14; Demetrius *On Style* 2.78; and M. H. McCall, Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Smile and Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) 139, 141, 154.

<sup>8</sup>W. A. Shibles, *Analysis of Metaphor in Light of W. M. Urban's Theories* (Paris: Mouton, 1971) 72–73.

<sup>9</sup>The illustration presented above is a modified form of one appearing in the book by A. Upton (*Design for Thinking* [Stanford: Stanford University, 1961] 77).

<sup>10</sup>M. C. Beardsley, *Thinking Straight* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950) 101–4.

ILLUSTRATION 1  
ANALOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF METAPHORS



through a child's kaleidoscope. Rather than separate the metaphorical elements, listing the points of agreement and disagreement between the referents, the components in this case produce meaning by interacting in dynamic relation with one another.<sup>11</sup> The fourth principle of interpretation applied to biblical metaphors underscores their univocal nature. Generally, metaphors accentuate one idea. Though it is true that secondary meanings emanate from the referents of metaphors, these nuances tend to distract from the central concept which the metaphors project when they are stressed beyond or to the exclusion of the major thought. By emphasizing the main idea of canonical metaphors, the interpreter preserves the unity and intention of the figures.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>M. Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1962) 27-47; and P. Wheelwright, *Metaphors and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1962) 70-91. A. J. Burgess ("Irreducible Religious Metaphors," *Relis* 8 [1972] 355-66) discusses the reducible and irreducible nature of religious metaphors. He says the factor which determines whether a metaphor can be paraphrased or not is the personal awareness or appreciation that the interpreter has of the context out of which the metaphor is derived.

<sup>12</sup>Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 86; and H. M. Gale, *The Use of Analogy in the Letters of Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 228-30. B. Keech (*Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* [London: J. W. Pusham, 1779] 37) observes that "more particularly there ought to be Care taken, that one Metaphor be not strained to express things in themselves quite opposite, nor make the Parallels run till they grow lame (sic)."

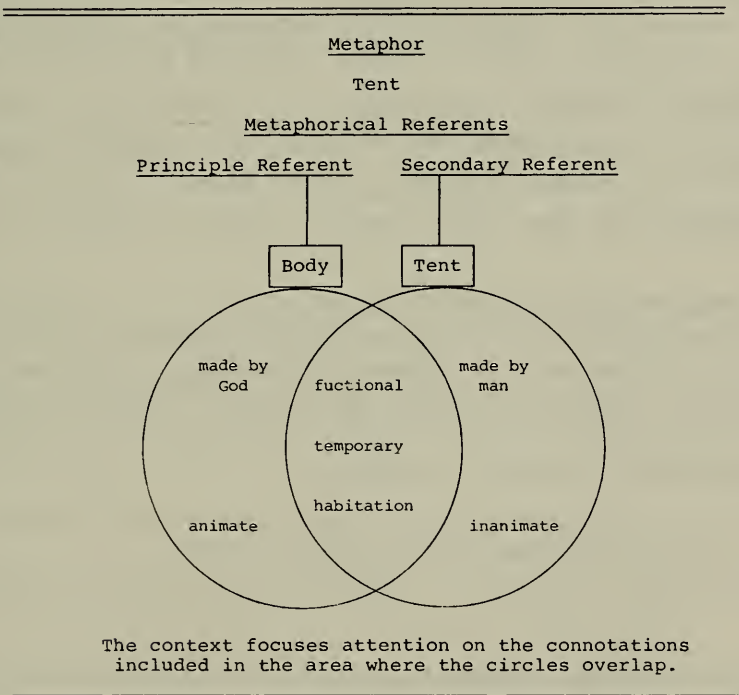


Consideration of context is important in determining the correct meaning of scriptural metaphors. Context performs this function by directing attention to the central thought of the image.<sup>13</sup> The dynamics of the contextual principle become apparent in analyzing 2 Corinthians 5:1,4.

- v. 1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.
- v. 2 For indeed while we are in this tent we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what mortal may be swallowed up by life.

In these verses Paul compares the natural bodies of the Corinthians to a tent. The next illustration shows how the context of this metaphor helps to determine its meaning.<sup>14</sup> Admittedly, the referents evoke more connotations than have been listed in the illustration. The diagram, however, serves to show how consideration of context

ILLUSTRATION 2  
CONTEXTUAL PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION



<sup>13</sup>Beardsley, *Thinking Straight*, 101–2; Burgess, “Irreducible Religious Metaphors,” 355–66; and C. Lockhart, *Principles of Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Kansas City: Central Seminary, 1952) 116.

<sup>14</sup>The illustration depicting the importance of context upon metaphorical interpretation is adapted from the discussion of metaphor by C. M. Wheeler (*The Design of Poetry* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1966] 164).

cuts out the irrelevant connotations and leaves only those that are pertinent and harmonious with the subject under discussion, *i.e.*, the natural bodies of the believers, while functional, are only temporary in nature.

The sixth principle of interpretation considered focuses on the relationship between culture and vocabulary. Vocabulary is inextricably bound and influenced by environment.<sup>15</sup> Hence, understanding the culture in which a word is used is necessary in order to decipher its meaning. Indeed, grammatical terms can be understood properly only in the context of their sociological function.<sup>16</sup> Difficulties with exposition multiply when analysis is applied to ancient literature because language changes with culture.<sup>17</sup> To achieve accurate exegesis of the Bible, the interpreter ought to study it with the context of the environment in which its parts were written.<sup>18</sup> Regarding biblical metaphors, correct interpretation is arduous unless the interpreter is knowledgeable of the subjects and life situations depicted by the metaphorical referents.

Textual metaphors, however, often are modified so that they no longer represent the phenomena or life situations from which they were drawn. The purpose of metaphors in biblical times was not so much to depict accurately an object or situation from the world, as it was to clarify and reinforce a thought. In other words, the authors of scripture sometimes adjusted their images to accommodate their thought. Consequently, the pictures projected by textual metaphors are not always accurate representations of the objects they supposedly refer to in the biblical world or of what the canonical writers really believe to be true regarding those objects.<sup>19</sup> Paul's reference to "the spiritual rock that accompanied" the Israelites through their

<sup>15</sup>Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 113–14, 119–24; H. E. Dana and R. E. Glaze, *Interpreting the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1961) 142–43; F. L. Fisher, *How to Interpret the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 39, 85–94; Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 159, 165–69; B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1956) 96, 114; and M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1890) 203.

<sup>16</sup>P. Henle, *Language, Thought and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1958) 19–20; and Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 170.

<sup>17</sup>J. Whatmough, *Language: A Modern Synthesis* (New York: Saint Martins, 1956) 184.

<sup>18</sup>Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 85–86. In order to handle metaphors correctly, Keach (*Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors*, 37) states "it is needful that a Person be well acquainted with the respective Natures, and philosophical Notions and Theories of all Things from whence this Trope is taken, as also with the peculiar Customs, and the distinct Qualities of other Nations, particularly the ancient Jewish State in their ecclesiastical and civil Government and Economy, besides the Knowledge of the original Languages, . . . which very frequently carry a native Grace and emphatical Fulness, hardly expressible . . . in a Translation (sic)."

<sup>19</sup>Gale, *The Use of Analogy in the Letters of Paul*, 225–26, 231.

wilderness wanderings (*I Cor.* 10:4) illustrates this point. The apostle knew that rocks are inanimate, that they do not of their own accord follow after people. However, he used the metaphor to underscore his thought that Christ was the source of the blessings the Israelites received in the desert.

Finally, of special concern for the interpreter of scriptural figures is the theological heritage of the biblical writers. The emphasis here centers upon the theological perspective from which the metaphorical constructions should be approached rather than upon the relationship between the metaphorical referents and the objects they depict. To enucleate the meanings evoked from biblical metaphors demands insight concerning the manifold influences which affected the theological development of the various authors. Such insights will reflect interpretation consistent with the canonical writer's doctrinal bias.

The intent of the preceding discussion has been to set forth principles for interpreting biblical metaphors. It is recognized that certain metaphors may "outrun every expository maneuver."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it is acknowledged that other metaphors may be best interpreted immediately and intuitively through sense perception. To the extent, however, that the meaning of biblical metaphors can be reduced to literal statements by application of the proposed guidelines, facility in exegeting them will be enhanced.

<sup>20</sup>Wheelwright, *Metaphors and Reality*, p. 116.



## Imagination and the Preaching of a Military Chaplain

Chaplain (Colonel) Raymond E. Ennis

Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. "No other religion has ever made the regular and frequent assembling of the masses of men, to hear religious instruction and exhortation, an integral part of divine worship."<sup>1</sup> Preaching is a primary function of the Christian Church.

Preaching held a central place in the ministry of Jesus. The testimony of all four gospel writers is clear on this point. They picture Jesus in the synagogues, in the villages, in the cities, by the sea, on the mountainsides, drawing crowds with his word and amazing hearers with His wisdom—always the itinerant preacher.

At the end of His ministry Jesus gave his disciples, according to the *Gospel of Mark*, the simple command to go everywhere preaching the gospel. The purpose of which was to make disciples, to baptize, and to instruct in Christian living.

Some see the whole history of the church as tending to have followed a cyclical pattern which underscores the importance of preaching; that is, "Church expansion through preaching, organization and stabilization, crystallization of forms of worship and service, decline of preaching and loss of spiritual objectives, revival, and then new expansion through strong preaching and so on."<sup>2</sup> In whatever age of the Church's history, there has been no great religious movement,

<sup>1</sup>Broadus, John A. *On The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.



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no restoration of Scripture as the source of truth, nor any reanimation of genuine piety without new power in preaching.

The military chaplain is many things to many people; but whatever else, the chaplain is, first of all, a preacher. As someone has said, chaplains are not being trained to motivate people to fight. They are being trained to minister to people who find themselves in difficult situations—situations like combat.<sup>3</sup> But if the chaplain is to be heard, then who he is for his hearers, before that moment of preaching, is very important. If the chaplain is the trusted counselor, the strengthening friend, the understanding neighbor, then the chaplain is more likely to be heard and the message—divine truth—more effectively communicated. The effective preacher is the effective chaplain—in the broadest sense.

Sometimes, even with this critical foundation of identity well established, there are barriers to communication, and the transmission of the Gospel message is impaired. Words are spoken and heard, but the gospel message is neither given nor received. It is as if a barrier exists between preacher and people. The chaplain preaches—in the chapel or in the field—the people appear to listen, but very little “gets through.” It is as if, according to one writer, a thick glass partition has been placed between the pulpit and the pews, to invisibly separate the preacher from the people—the chaplain from the soldiers.<sup>4</sup>

There are perhaps a number of ways to break this barrier; but, in my experience, there is no better way than the disciplined and creative use of the preacher’s—and the people’s—imagination. According to Horace Bushnell, a successful and well respected preacher, the Gospel itself is a “gift to the imagination.” Homiletically speaking, imagination is “the God-given power which enables the minister to see what is hidden from other eyes and to share his experience with his friend in the pew.”<sup>5</sup>

From the material stored in the mind of the preacher, the imagination creates a living world. It fills in the gaps, gives atmosphere and warmth to the barest landscape, and engages the hearer to envision more than skeletal facts or stick figures. Mere facts may make a wrong impression; imagination clothes facts with living scenes to present and to disclose the hidden truth. Imagination is the basis for all figurative language. It compares object with unlikely object to make a new way of seeing; it uses the familiar to point beyond the known, and it creates from the data of experience, the

<sup>3</sup>Anonymous.

<sup>4</sup>Galle, Joseph *Military Chaplains' Review* (November 1973), Vol. 2. No. 4, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup>Blackwood, Andrew *Preaching From the Bible*, p. 197.

world of truth. "Imagination is the imaging function of the mind. As contrasted with reasoning, it is thinking by seeing."<sup>6</sup>

In preaching, as with any art, the imagination works on many different levels. At one level, there is the descriptive work of the imagination. It is perhaps the most familiar because it ordinarily deals with the experiences of real life. For example, history, successful history, is much more than the bare record or rehearsal of the facts. It is story; that is, a recounting of the facts in such a way as to allow the reader to understand and to relive what the historian provides. It is interesting to contemplate how historians will put into words the current complexities—the wonderful discoveries and accomplishments juxtaposed with the dreadful injustices and oppression of our day. Our day, like few before it, will demand a more difficult counterpoint of insight and writing than any other to explain its awful paradoxes and to allow some future reader to imaginatively experience our age.

When the chaplain sees in his own mind what is said from the pulpit, the chaplain has used the power of descriptive imagination. And this art is learned largely by reading those who write imaginatively. Although this learning is indirect, it has been observed that "almost every strong Bible preacher has been an ardent lover of history, especially in the form of biography."<sup>7</sup>

The second area of the imaginative work might be called the construction area. It is the ability to shape the composition or combination of the parts and elements of the sermon so as to form a new and engaging whole. This ability has a good deal to do with the vitality of the sermon, and speaks of nothing less than the power of God granted the preacher—a power that is good deal more than what we have come to mean by the cheapened usage of the word *inspiration*, but it is nonetheless inspiration of the highest sort. It is, if you will, the breath of the sermon. Alexander White held that knowledge gives atmosphere and ideas formed the content of the message, but before the message can become power, it "must be fused by the glow of personal experience and lit up by the flash of imagination."<sup>8</sup>

A modern and unfortunate misunderstanding of imagination ties the idea exclusively to the unreal world of the child. Because children imagine themselves to be Superwoman, a soldier, or a physician, imagination is viewed as a childish exercise and a waste of time. The imagination is, after all, an illusion; and as the reductionists who hold this view would have it, a misrepresentation of reality.

I like to call the third area of the imagination the creative area. Here one is able to see what can be created and sets out to develop

<sup>6</sup>Broadus, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>7</sup>Blackwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 203–204.

<sup>8</sup>Miller, Donald G. *The Way to Biblical Preaching*, p. 285.



the imagined thoughts. Although it's been said that only the man of genius makes his abode in this realm, my observation is that it is exactly in this realm where the military chaplain is able to excel.

A military chaplain with imagination not only sees what is there before him and says grace, but sees all that is not and asks why. Creative imagination is the ability to see order when most men are experiencing chaos. According to S.S. Curry, "The imagination gives atmosphere and stimulates individual ideas."<sup>9</sup>

If the chaplain seems to lack imagination or, at least, seems to not use his imagination, it is probably due to the extraordinary demands made on the chaplain's time and on the emotional and draining quality of most of those demands. Chaplains have said that the demands of the outside world are so pressing and frequent that to sit down and think alone is guilt producing. Some have said they experience this time to themselves as an unauthorized escape from the responsibilities of their office.

In most circumstances to deny the development of the imaginative because of pressing demands from the outside world—whether from soldiers or the command—diminishes the quality of the service and ministry in the long run. Because imagination is indispensable in the construction of a meaningful sermon, this dimension of the chaplain's ministry can most easily be damaged without adequate time for reflection and thought. Good sermons are more than a mere string of intelligible words. Even before words, the chaplain must see the truth and allow that truth to become a part of him. Ordinarily this process requires a kind of living with the truth that can be easily interrupted or denied by a plague of mundane demands. The process requires reflection and perhaps a kind of solitude, but paradoxically an authentic engagement and sensitivity to the needs and struggles of people as well.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel set an example for prophets and preachers of all times when he said, "I sat where they sat; and I remained there astonished among them seven days."<sup>10</sup> He put himself in their place. He so identified with the situation that their doom became his burden. The chaplain must sit where those to whom he speaks sits until he understands their needs, appreciates their struggles, knows their pain, and celebrates their joys—all to remind them of who they are: the people of God.

If the sermon is to be successful, the preacher—like the artist, the architect, and the sculptor—must do more than form the general lines and outlines of the work. Details demand attention. As the chaplain forms each sentence of the sermon, the purpose and function of the sentence in the light of the whole sermon, must be evident.

<sup>9</sup>Curry, S. S. *Foundations of Expression*, p. 146.

<sup>10</sup>Ezekiel 3:5.

It is the chaplain's imagination which allows him to dress his ideas in familiar clothing. When a thought takes definite shape, animated by the imagination of the preacher with the color and textures of life and story, the imagination of the hearer is touched, his feelings are engaged, and his memory is stirred. For example, if the preacher, instead of dwelling upon the definition or identification of compassion, uses examples of compassionate people who have responded to the needs of the suffering, the hearer sees the truth and is able to imagine himself responding in a similar way. A picture is perhaps the most effective argument.

Dr. John A. Broadus called "historical imagination" one of the most powerful allies of preaching. It makes history real by creating pictures in the mind of scenes, people, and events in the past which might otherwise be lost to memory. But the historical imagination relates also the present to the future, and as Dr. Broadus says, to the eternal.

And not only to the past is imagination needed; it is requisite if we are justly to conceive and vividly to realize the scripture revelation concerning the unseen world and the eternal future. Faith believes revelation, and imagination, aroused by faith and called into its service, makes the things unseen and eternal a definite reality to the mind, so that they affect the feelings almost like objects of sense and become a power in our earthly life. It may also to some extent fill out the Bible pictures of the unseen world by following the analogies of this world; but there is here demanded a moderation and reserve, a care in distinguishing between the revealed and the supposed which in some books and many sermons are sadly wanting.<sup>11</sup>

To some degree all people possess the power of imagination. However it would seem that not all have the gift or the will to use it. While few have what might be called imaginative genius, all of us can develop the imaginative powers that we have. The imagination responds to cultivation and dies with neglect.

How can the chaplain nurture his imagination? What can the chaplain do to become a more imaginative person? The following suggestions and directions, first given more than a decade ago, with some updating warrant a second look.

1. View the world through the eyes of the most imaginative who have ever lived. Immerse yourself in the *Psalms*, but also in Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Eliot,

<sup>11</sup>Broadus, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

Longfellow and Frost. For current uses of the imagination, read books by such writers as F. B. Speakman, John Killenger, and Frederick Buechner. Underline words and phrases to which you respond with excitement. Repeat them aloud.

2. Carry a notebook to jot down personal observations and experiences which happen day to day. Realize that wherever you are—in the city, the town or country—you are always surrounded by ideas for sermons. Whatever grips your heart or engages your mind should be placed in the journal. Over the years a treasury of descriptions will have been recorded. Some will be of direct homiletical use. What is most important, however, is the growth of the imagination which accompanies the process of observation and writing.
3. Remove all self-imposed limitations and let your mind move freely. Let even the absurdities come to the front; they may not be absurd at all! By creating mental images, sermon ideas begin to grow, take shape, and move.
4. Apply specific questions to your text and sermonic ideas. For example: Who would agree with this idea? Who would disagree with it? Who would feel threatened by it? What Bible character would get upset by hearing this text or sermon idea proclaimed? How would various Bible characters react to it: *e.g.*, Abraham, Moses Jezebel, Amos, Jesus, Paul? Or from the history of theology, how would Calvin, Luther, Bonhoeffer, Pope John XXIII, Martin Luther King react to it? What questions would each ask? How about Mark Twain or C. S. Lewis? What would Freud or Fromm have to say about it? Would any of these be moved to anger by your decision to preach the message?
5. Focus your attention on why the text is there in the first place. What idea, truth, or religious principle would be altered or abandoned if it were not there? How would the church, your people, you, others, the world be different if it had not be written? Would the people have missed something important? Is it unique?



6. Imagine that a stranger is sitting beside you. Read the text to him. Tell him your idea for the sermon. Imagine his reaction to it. Jot these thoughts down. Then imagine a close friend taking his seat next to you. Read the text aloud to him and check his reactions. Also note the way that you spoke. Did you explain it differently to the stranger? How?
7. Imagine that it is Sunday morning and as you go to the place of preaching you see only women, or old people or handicapped persons in the congregation? Imagine that you have a chapel full of drug abusers. Visualize a congregation composed of other societal groups. How can you reach minds and wills, thoughts and feelings with this text?<sup>12</sup>

It is sometimes thought that all a chaplain needs to do to become a good preacher is to have another how-to manual, a new method or technique. The truth is every chaplain possesses the potential for significant sermonic accomplishment. Key elements for success, after a love of soldiers, are the courage to experiment, the willingness to learn and change, and an appreciation for the power of the imagination.

<sup>12</sup>Galle, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61.

# Humor As A Preaching Tool

Chaplain (Captain) Thomas E. Troxell

I laughed in church today. It was neither a high-pitched cackle, nor was it a foot-stompin', back-slappin', tears-on-the-cheek belly buster. It may have been a quiet chuckle. Whatever the case, I laughed out loud. While laughing in church may not be such an extraordinary experience, this laughter was caused by the preacher's joke. "What's so unusual about that?" you ask. It was unusual because the joke fit into the sermon in an appropriate way. It was not told, as is sometimes done by a guest preacher, to put the congregation or the preacher at ease. The joke had a purpose. It was used to illustrate a point. It had perfect timing. It fit at just the right point — amazing! Awesome! And then I woke up!

Just an idle daydream? I don't think so. The academic posturing of a Doctor of Ministry project? Perhaps. Let me ask you a question: Have you ever considered humor as a preaching tool? I am not asking if you've ever told a joke or said something humorous during your preaching. Have you ever considered humor as a tool to be used in the crafting of a sermon? A tool to be used as carefully as you choose words, theme sentences, connecting thoughts, and illustrations?

There are those of you who may be ready to put down this article, believing that the preaching of the Word is a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. Hear me out. I believe that exactly. There are others of you who want to use humor, but have been afraid to try it. What follows should help you overcome that fear. The rest of you do use humor more or less effectively. For you this article contains



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information and ideas to assist you in becoming more effective in your present use of humor. Hopefully all will be able to cultivate a more effective use of humor.

It is not my intention to debate the validity of preaching for 20th century man. I assume that it is valid and will continue to be valid for the next twenty centuries. Indeed, the Word reminds us that God has chosen to use the foolishness of preaching as the chief means of gathering and nurturing His flock.<sup>1</sup> It is this emphasis on the primacy of preaching, based on the written Word, that has been the benchmark of the historic Protestant ideal for preaching. It is out of this strong kerygmatic approach, the "Thus saith the Lord of the Scriptures," that the present essay is written.

As mentioned before, when one begins to discuss seriously the proper use of humor in the sermon, many objections are raised. What kind of rational can there be? After all, you maintain a high view of Scripture. How can you trifle with the serious things of God? Seriousness and humor are not incompatible, as some would think. In fact, some writers have even gone so far as to suggest that laughter and tears are two sides to the same coin.<sup>2</sup> Basing their ideas largely on a misreading of *Isaiah* 53, there are those who suggest that Jesus never laughed. Jesus, as the Man of Sorrows, certainly did not laugh at sin and the consequences of sin in the life of man. However, it is folly to state *a priori* that Jesus was humorless. Unless humor is in the domain of the wicked, it is a part of God's created order and, as such, is to be used for our enjoyment. At the same time, if we truly believe in the full humanity of Jesus, we must believe Jesus laughed. Not only did He laugh, but He must have laughed with foot-stompin', back-slappin', tears-on-the-cheek, belly-bustin' laughter.

If you doubt Jesus laughed, I suggest two things. First, read Elton Trueblood's *The Humor of Christ*<sup>3</sup> to gain a fresh perspective on the matter. You need not accept his theological starting point to see that his basic conclusion regarding Jesus and humor is correct. Secondly, read the Bible in a modern language translation. I believe our overfamiliarity with the King James or some of the other older versions makes it difficult to see humorous passages in scripture.

"Unconvincing," you say. "Granted, Jesus may have laughed. What about the rest of the Bible? Can you demonstrate the presence of humor there?" Yes. The greatest form of humor in the Old Testament is the pun.<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew mind was, and continues to be, fond of the subtleties of language play. The Old Testament also contains

<sup>1</sup>*I Corinthians* 1:21

<sup>2</sup>cf. essays in M. Conrad Hyers, ed. *Holy Laughter: Essay on Religion in the Comic Perspective* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>True Blood, ELTM *The Humor of Christ* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964.)

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34, see note



elements of satire. Amos' prophetic tongue was planted firmly in his cheek when he labeled the rich women of Israel, "cows of Bashan" (4:1). The fool of *Proverbs* is a humorous figure, too lazy to take his hand out of the dish (26:15) and too fearful to go out because he heard a lion was loose in the street (22:13).

The New Testament contains pun<sup>5</sup> and more pointed uses of humor. Consider the obvious humor in the man who seeks to remove the speck from your eye with a plank in his own eye (*Matt.* 7:3); and Paul's desire for the Judaizer's knife to slip (*Gal.* 5:12). My favorite is Jesus' dealing with the Pharisees as recorded in *Matthew* 23:23-24. How silly their cleaning and polishing the outside of the cup without washing the inside—leaving last night's coffee stains. Best of all, is T.L. Glover's expressive description of the Pharisee straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel (*Matt.* 23:24): "... he swallowed a camel. How many of us have ever pictured the process and the series of sensations, as the long, bony neck slides down the throat of the Pharisee—all that amplitude of loose-hung anatomy—the hump—two humps—both of them slide down—and he never notices—and then followed by the legs—all four of them—with the whole outfit of knees and big padded feet. The Pharisee swallowed a camel—and never noticed it."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Douglas G. Adams's survey of humor in the American pulpit gives ample evidence of the pointed, purposeful use of humor during the period 1740–1870.<sup>7</sup> Some of the noted preachers of the 19th and 20th centuries used humor effectively in their sermons. For example, C.H. Spurgeon, Billy Sunday, and Harry Emerson Fosdick were effective masters of the use of humor. Modern radio ministers, Oswald Hoffman and Charles Swindoll, continue to exemplify the proper use of humor in sermons. The majority of current homiletics textbooks allow for the appropriate use of humor in the sermon. The problem is not whether to use humor, but how to use it.

The use of humor, like the elements of a sermon, must be purposeful. All too often, though, the humor used in sermons is bad humor. Bad humor is not well thought out, ill-fitting to the point being made, too long, or crude. Most preachers will have to admit that they frequently use the joke or humorous story in a sermon, not to illustrate a point, but to illustrate their sense of humor. No wonder the congregation moans when the preacher starts his story. It serves no purpose, not even the purpose of good entertainment.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*The Jesus of History* (London: The Student Christian Movement, 1917, p. 47).

<sup>7</sup>*Humor in the American Pulpit from George Whitefield to Henry Ward Beecher* (Austin: The Sharing Company, 1981)

The sermon, and all its component parts, must have a purpose. In *Preaching with Purpose*, Dr. Jay E. Adams<sup>8</sup> identifies three purposes for the sermon: to persuade, to motivate, and to inform. Any material included in a sermon must fit within one of these general purposes. The question to be asked is not: Is humor appropriate? The right question is: Is this joke, anecdote, or story appropriate to the point I am seeking to make? One must always ask the purpose of including any particular piece of material, including humor, in the sermon.

It is easy to miss Adams's point. He differentiates between a lecture stance—talking to someone about something and a preaching stance—telling someone what God requires of them. In military language, he is advocating unity of effort and economy of force in the sermon. All things which do not fit into the overarching purpose of the sermon must be ruthlessly eliminated. All things which contribute to the purpose of the sermon may be used. This includes humor.

The purposeful use of humor in sermons is not new. The key concept is purposeful. Humor used in sermons must clearly illustrate or add to the point. Remember, we are preaching, not delivering, a stand-up comedy routine. The humor must be carefully chosen with the audience in mind. The humor must be tasteful, compassionate, healing, and positive. It must never be black humor, the kind that is ugly, gross, degrading, or profane. However, at this point in the discussion it is easy for our thinking to be diverted, trying to define good and bad humor, appropriate and inappropriate humor, purposeful and purposeless. I am reminded of E. B. White's remark regarding the definition of humor. It (humor) "... can be dissected, as a frog, but the thing dies in the process, and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind."

Two brief points regarding purpose before we move on. The first is to consider the audience. A sermon used for the women of the chapel and for the troops in a field service may not have the same humorous illustrations. The second is subject matter. There are forms of humor that do not lend themselves well to subjects such as pain, suffering or death. The preacher is urged to use humor in these areas with caution, perhaps avoiding the humorous altogether.

Several things are required for cultivating the use of humor as a preaching tool.

1. You must be in good humor yourself. You don't need to be a comedian. You do need to be able to laugh easily at yourself and at the situations of life. Nothing is worse than someone trying to be humorous who is not.

<sup>8</sup>Philipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982.

2. Recognize your temperament may not allow you to use humor. Not everyone laughs easily, nor do we all see things equally funny.

3. Read humorous material—both past and present. The humorous sections of *Reader's Digest* and the op-ed pages of the newspaper are good places to start.

4. Start a file of humorous material, beginning with what you know. Write out stories and jokes fully so you can be precise—timing is important. File these under one heading and three or four cross-references.

5. Carefully observe the human situation and write about what you see. The incongruities of life provide much humorous material.

To stress the importance of keeping one's eyes on the Lord, a preacher once spoke of why Peter found it so hard to walk on water. The preacher said, "When Peter let his eyes drift away from Jesus, the water covered his ankles." As he said the words, the preacher sank slightly into the pulpit. As the preacher said, "When Peter was distracted by the force of the waves, the water came to his knees," the preacher sank even further into the box of the pulpit. With the cry, "Jesus, save me." Peter and the preacher dropped from sight.

This story illustrates the effective use of humor in a sermon. It is purposeful, clever, and well executed. It is the kind of humor that should be used in preaching. The congregation laughed, the preacher made the point, and the moment was memorable. My dream of humor well used may have been a reality after all.



## A Good Word for Wedding Sermons

LCDR Robert J. Phillips, CHC, USN

What question is a chaplain most often asked? While I have neither surveys nor statistics on which to draw for scientific proof, I do have a hunch. The question is not, "When was the Council of Chalcedon," nor "Is this verse in *Genesis* from the J source or the E source"? Regrettably, it is not even, "What must I do to be saved"? The question chaplains are habitually asked is, "Will you marry us"?

It is amazing how a simple question can raise a welt on the hide of one's theology. No amount of seminary perparation or personal reading can prepare a member of the clergy for the impact of that question. The "ideal" couple, religiously active, emotionally mature, financially secure and known to the chaplain since childhood, just doesn't come around. It is the couple whose relationship drips with theological ambiguity who often sits before the chaplain seeking his or her deft hands to tie the knot.

This article is not an exposition on what is involved in developing a total response to a request for marriage. In grappling with the dimensions of conducting a service of Christian marriage, there is one practice I have learned and found helpful. At every wedding I conduct, there is a sermon. I have not always preached a wedding homily, and now I pass no judgment on others who do not. The rituals for marriage in numerous denominations, including my own United Methodist Church, do not formally include a place in the liturgy of marriage for the preached word. But no church rituals of which I am aware forbid a sermon. I would like to share some comments and ideas on the "why and how" of preaching at a wedding.



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One reason for preaching at weddings is precisely because it is a service of worship. Preaching is never out of place as an integral part of worship. There is something about a sermon that can remind a collection of family, friends and hangers-on of the drama of spiritual commitment and love being played out before the altar. There is a richness in the vows of the traditional marriage services and the more thoughtful contemporary services that can set the stage for reflection on the role of God in marriage. The sermon can reinforce and interpret some spiritual aspect of what is happening, thus helping to transform an audience into a congregation. In a society which is often bewildered by, suspicious of, or indifferent to the religious dimension of a wedding, a sermon can serve as a powerful and positive reminder of the spiritual reality.

A second reason for preaching at weddings is for outreach to the unchurched and the lapsed. Two-thirds of Americans raised in the church part from that commitment for greater or lesser periods during young adult life. For many, the only experience with church comes either at weddings or funerals. A clear expression of the Christian faith, couched in a practical application to married life, can plant a seed that with time and grace is likely to grow.

I do not refer to an intense or aggressively evangelistic sermon. This could kindle understandable resentment in those who dislike being ambushed by the chaplain. An uplifting message that shares an aspect of faith pertaining to marriage can bear witness to the unchurched that Christ has something to say to every life.

A third reason to preach at weddings is as a reminder of the ideal. It was said of the Romans that during their period of decadence, they loved the ideals even after they had lost them. Many adults, at a given wedding, have been divorced or deeply affected by marital conflict or unhappiness, either directly or through family or friends. For these, a message of hope, grace, forgiveness or reconciliation can start the process of opening a life shuttered by cynicism or hurt. A fresh cleansing breath of the Gospel can restore at least some of the vision of what a marriage can be with God's help.

This is not to endorse painting an unrealistic or simplistic picture of human relationships. Christian marriages involve real people who make mistakes, get grouchy, forget to pick up their clothes or leave the dishes to wash themselves. Christians know the pain of divorce. People who make their way in the real world will reject a picture too perfectly painted. A sermon can help to restate the ideal where the pressures of life and the jaded gloss of television marriages have smeared the image of God's goals for a couple. The sermon also can provide tangible pastoral help in building a marriage relationship in areas where couples are most likely to struggle. Practical insights on communication, handling conflicting expectations, and facing common stress can be presented.



How one preaches at a wedding is as important as why. The following observations are offered on how the theory of wedding preaching has translated into the fact at the marriages I have performed. These are not exhaustive remarks, certainly, nor are they necessarily the best for the situation. They have served me well and, in that light, I share them with you.

First, keep it short. Clergy are used to standing during sermons. The wedding party is not. Lengthy discourses can produce obvious cases of fidgeting and foot-rocking by bride and groom that will quickly capture the amused attention of the congregation. Our culture is geared to television attentiveness, complete with commercial breaks every twelve minutes. A wedding sermon running the length of "Ben Hur" will lose interest long before the last amen. I used to believe "sermonettes" were for "christianettes". This is not true in the case of wedding sermons.

Second, keep it simple. The wedding sermon is neither a substitute for adequate premarital counseling nor the place to launch a theological tome on the Barthian understanding of marriage as an expression of the orders of creation. Even the legendary three point sermon may have two points too many. Charles Kingsley, in a letter to a friend, told him to "get hold of some one great truth." A single point, simply stated and reinforced with a practical illustration and application, will be remembered. A finely-spun treatise with foot-notes and Greek verbs will be consigned to the dustbin of forgetfulness by a congregation largely unpracticed in hearing sermons. A. N. Whitehead's advice to seek simplicity, and distrust it has its place. But Whitehead was not thinking as much about the marriage sermon as about the marriage!

Third, keep it positive. The wedding sermon is not the place to recite divorce statistics or ponder the "Seven Year Itch." Granted, I have sometimes used the reputed crack of Socrates, "Whether you marry or not, you'll regret it," but sparingly and in good humor. If the chaplain is frustrated, perhaps feeling that he is being used by the couple, it is critical to sort out the matter with trusted peers before being committed to do the service. Feelings of anger and frustration, sloshing over a congregation in a sarcastic sermon, drive persons away from the faith. In contrast, a positive message encourages and inspires those present.

Fourth, keep it personal. This is not easy. Being a bride or groom at a wedding is as close to an out-of-the-body experience as they may every have. The powers of concentration are centered on placing the ring on the correct finger without dropping the bouquet. A personal word to the couple can assist in easing the tension and can help create an atmosphere of reverent joy. By definition, a sermon is for the whole congregation. For those who are already married, the occasion will be an opportunity for remembering their wedding and



renewing their commitment to each other. Balancing the message with some personal words for the couple and more general words for the entire gathering can serve to include all the worshippers and give them each a sense of ownership in the wedding.

Fifth, keep it classy. A collection of wedding sermons, constantly refined and improved, is not cheating. Each sermon can be tailored to the couple and the congregation while communicating some aspect of a Christian understanding of marriage. I do not feel obliged to come up with a totally new sermon for each wedding. This may not be a good idea in a civilian parish or military chapel where many of the same persons attend a number of weddings. Where the congregation is different from wedding to wedding, the practice brings both profit and meaning to the event. Discretion, realism and sensitivity to the Spirit's leading can assist the chaplain in finding his or her way to a quality message for the occasion.

Many who attend a modern wedding have little or no concept of what is happening spiritually. Reclaiming the wedding as an act of worship is no easy task. The wedding sermon can be a vital and practical way to plant seeds of faith and understanding. It can remind all who attend of the role God plays in the creation of a marriage, family and home. It can help to transform what is frequently an act of cultural conformity into an act of worship and praise.

## Ethics and Preaching

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Herman Keizer, Jr.

“Did I not tell your messenger whom you sent to me . . . what the Lord speaks, that will I speak?” (*Numbers 24:12-13*)

Few of us would have the audacity  
To claim that the words we speak  
Are words of God.  
Even in the Old Testament passage  
The sentence ends in a question mark.  
Which is about where I end  
When I think about it.

But I am a face of God.  
Must I not also be a mouth of God  
Speaking what he cannot speak,  
Except through me  
Encouraging where he cannot encourage  
Except through me  
Exploring and exchanging ideas  
Where he is silent, except through me.  
Yet it is a startling thought.  
If I were aware for one day  
That God speaks when I speak,  
It would either temper the tone of my tongue  
Or broaden my image  
Of the range of God's emotions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>DePree, Gordon and Gladis, *Faces of God*, Harper and Row, New York, 1974, page 57.



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The audacity of the preacher to proclaim that the preached word is God's Word causes prophets to question and poets to muse. So it should. Preaching is a phenomena worthy of our intense scrutiny, worthy of our awe, worthy of our energy.

It is especially important for us to look at preaching today. Things are happening in North American Protestantism and in Roman Catholicism which demand our attention. We are in a renaissance. You can hear the sounds of the renaissance in the electronic pulpits, the printed media, the political rhetoric, and in the many sounds of the growing church.

The renaissance has much to do with preaching. Preaching is central to what is happening within the Christian community in America today. How can one make such a claim?

A decade and a half ago, in 1971, Peter Berger compared his criticism of mainline Protestants of the 1950's and the 1960's with what he observed in the 70's. In his analysis he observed a resurgence of powerful religious impulses stirring in the habitat of "modern man." He noted a widespread hunger for religious answers to questions. This need arises, he said, out of the demoralized character of modern society.

If historical experience is taken into account, societies afflicted with widespread anomie have either perished or have regenerated themselves through a renaissance of their fundamental values. For reasons that are probably deeply rooted in the constitution of man, such renaissances have usually had a powerful religious dimension.<sup>2</sup>

How will this renaissance be carried out? Berger's answer has profound implications for preaching. It will not be those who have been "falling all over each other to be relevant to modern man."<sup>3</sup> Berger points us away from a search for a culture with which to identify. He points us to the pulpit.

More important, strong eruptions of religious faith have been marked by the appearance of people with firm, unapologetic, often uncompromising convictions — that is, by types the very opposite from those presently engaged in the various "relevance" operations. Put simply: age of faith are not marked by "dialogue," but by proclamation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Berger, Peter L. *Facing Up to Maturity*, Basic Book, Inc., New York, 1977, page 191.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p.192.



The pulpit message — the proclamation — will be delivered in different accents, Berger acknowledges. Accents always make up the speech of the Christian Church in the historical situation, however, the stance will be *a stance of authority*. Berger's call to a stance of authority and to proclamation point to a need for us to begin to address the ethics of preaching. When Berger tries to identify the authority he is seeking, he speaks of it in terms of the qualities of the speaker. He points to their *ethos*. "It is the authority of those who have come to terms with their own experience and who are convinced that, however imperfect a measure, they have grasped some important truths about the human condition."<sup>6</sup>

In "A Theological Essay on the Power of the Pulpit," James Daane also claims the pulpit is at the core of what is happening today. Daane points out that the deserters of the pulpit in the 60's separated speech from act. "They contended that enacting Christian truth in Christian deeds was far more effective than preaching in the pulpit."<sup>7</sup>

It is of course ironic that those who issued this summons to the church did by means of sermons spoken from the pulpit. Only a sermon was powerful enough to cut the sermon down to size; and the only place from which the church would effectively be moved out of itself into the world was the pulpit itself. We can see in this paradox about the mystery of preaching."<sup>9</sup>

Daane's analysis of preaching evidences that both the evangelical community and the social activists have separated speech from act. Daane's analysis of why preaching has fallen on evil days is that the "sermon is regarded as just another form of human speech rather than a special genre."<sup>10</sup> What Daane does is to combine speech and act. "In a code word: the preacher is part of what is preached."<sup>11</sup>

Daane's argument is a step beyond Berger's. While Berger identified the ethos of the speaker as the stance of authority, Daane sees more than just the speaker's ethos. "The mystery of an event in which a human being speaks God's words and God thereby speaks

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.193.

<sup>7</sup>Daane, James, *Preaching with Confidence*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980, pp. 2-16.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>9</sup>*Op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p.6.

his Word through human words cannot be explained in human language without recourse to paradox!”<sup>12</sup>

The different paths each man takes is not because they disagree, but because they speak from every different disciplines —Berger, the sociologist and Daane, the theologian. They are claiming the pulpit’s centrality, and they are using many languages to make this claim. One can go to any library and find preaching presented in the language of the evangelist, the psychologist, the dogmatic theologian, the biblical theologian, the sociologist, communication theorist, liturgist, and the homilist.

The single discipline whose voice is rarely heard when preaching is discussed is the ethicist’s. Raymon W. McLaughlin’s, *The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching*, published in 1979, stands virtually alone. “I was disappointed to find so little written on the subject in homiletical literature.”<sup>13</sup> McLaughlin’s basic argument then was that all sermons are by nature persuasive. But are all forms of sermons persuasion ethical? The answer is unequivocal, no. The heart of the book, and McLaughlin’s thinking, was a constructive and detailed explanation of how sermonic persuasion can and must be ethical.

But even with McLaughlin’s work, much is left undone. For example, he doesn’t explore the ethical manipulation of symbols which Aldous Huxley so brilliantly discusses in *Brave New World Revisited*. The ethical implications of the exegetical-hermeneutic-sermonic task becomes more profound when held before a mirror which says, “Effective rational propoganda becomes possible only when there is a clear understanding of the part of all concerned of the nature of symbols and their relations to things and events symbolized.” Persuasive speech is much more complex than can be explored in one volume.

The most fascinating of possible discussions not found in the literature on preaching is: Why is so little emphasis placed on the ethics of preaching? Before anything definitive can be said more research would need to be conducted.

Fancy a story like this: In schools three and four decades ago the pre-seminarian took courses in speech and rhetoric in undergraduate studies. Here they studied Aristotle’s *The Rhetoric*. They analyzed the importance of ethos for their new profession. They knew that they would have to acquire a reputation, to establish a name, and establish their person in the community of faith. They also knew that the community would help them generate an ethos by credentialing them with degrees, call, ordinations, and titles. They also knew, as the

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>13</sup>McLaughlin, Raymond W. *The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching*. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979., p. 9.

<sup>14</sup>Huxley, Aldous *Brave New World Revisited*, Harper and Row, Inc. 1958, p. 9.



theologians point out, inherent in the message they were to bring was the process of God's self-disclosure, of God's speaking through them.

This preparation—this pre-seminary work—was carried into the seminary by these future ministers. Gradually, however, schools taught less and less about ethos and ethics. Speech classes became classes on technique. The focus of persuasion became less an ethical issue and more an issue for the empirical disciplines. Speech came to be analyzed in terms of silent messages and hidden persuaders. Ethos was lost and with it any discussion of the relationship of preaching to ethics.

If this little story resembles the truth, then preaching and ethics is part of a wider problem. Both Berger and Daane hint at the problem when they show a disconnect between speech and act even as they seek to demonstrate that speech and act are inseparable.

The theme which underlies the concern here is a troublesome question: What is the nature of the human act? Bernstein in his book, *Praxis and Action*,<sup>15</sup> argues that all major movements in modern philosophy begin with Hegel and all seek to unravel the dialectic knot Hegel tied us in. Marx's praxis, Dewey's pragmatism, Kierkegaard's melancholia and Sartre's existentialist despair all raise questions about the nature of act.

The importance of speech to human action is graphically illustrated in the story of Helen Keller. Lack of speech, lack of a symbolic world, which would have allowed her to articulate what she experienced or who she was, locked Helen in a world beyond the scope of our understanding. It was language, it was speech which gave birth to Helen Keller. When Ann Sullivan shot a word through the darkness, Keller became distinct, actualized, and a human actor.

Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: "Who are you"? This disclosure of who someone is, is implicit in both his words and his deeds . . . Without the accompaniment of speech, at any rate action would not only lose its relevatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject . . . No other human performance requires speech to the same extent as action. In all other performances, speech plays a subordinate role, as a means of communication . . . In acting and speaking men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world. This disclosure of who in contradistinction to what somebody is . . . is implicit

<sup>15</sup>Bernstein, Richard J. *Praxis and Action*. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1971.



in everything somebody says and does. It can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity . . . Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others . . . Action without a name, a 'who' attached to it, is meaningless."<sup>16</sup>

The relationship of speech to act is profoundly important to the Christian message. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Revelation, act, speech are all tied together in Jesus, the son of Joseph, Jesus the Christ.

When the preacher's preach, they utter both human words but also God's words. The preachers reveal not only themselves but they reveal God. As they recite the acts of God, they reveal the acts of God in their lives. As they proclaim, they are heralds and agents of God. The ethos of God is revealed in the preacher's ethos.

If ethics deals with what man ought to do, then the preacher ought to do what God wants him to do.

The power of the Word of God is not abstracted from the one who speaks the word.<sup>17</sup>

Think of it: Not what we are, are we; but what we are to become - that is what we are.<sup>18</sup>

One increasingly influential concept has been growing out of this book, integrity! With integrity the Christian preacher finds his preaching taking on an ethical "tone." Without it, ethical seems "brassy" like a "noisy gong or a clanging symbol." (*I Corinthians* 13:1)<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men. (*II Corinthians* 5:11a)

Preaching is not so much the preparation of the sermon and proclamation of it, as it is the preparation and presentation-proclamation of the preacher's life. The presentation of a man prepared by the Word of God is offered to God's people so that they may be doers as well as hearers of the Word. The main purpose of the proclamation is not to be found in the listening, but in the doing, the important response to the proclaimed message.

<sup>16</sup>Arendt, Hannah *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, pp. 178-181.

<sup>17</sup>Daane, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup>Bartow, Charles L. *The Preaching Moment*. Abingdon, Nashville, 1980, page 112.

<sup>19</sup>McLaughlin, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

When the preacher works on the sermon, the main question is: What are you doing to these people? A more profound question yet comes in the proclamation itself: What do you want these people to do when you finish the sermon? When you say amen, what do you want to let be?

Once again we are brought to the ethical problem of human action or agency. The movement away from orthodoxy to orthopraxis is an important shift in theological concerns. The developmental movements of Kolberg and Fowler are psychological perspectives on this ethical question.

The basic problem is to view faith as a verb. The English language only uses the word as a noun. When faith becomes a verb, it becomes an action, a way of life. As an action the life of faith is open to ethical inquiry. As dogma faith is only open to logic or consistency or argumentation. But the preacher who struggles with faith as doing wants his struggle for integrity to be the model for God's people as they struggle to be and do.

The people of God struggling with their doing is a mighty call to action. The sermon is the voice of God heralding his people to action. The pulpit is the source from which all Christian action must flow.

So little has been done to analyze the act of preaching from the discipline of ethics that we can decry the little done or we can embrace the opportunity to strengthen the dialogue between ethics and preaching. The vigor of disciplined thinking is the rigor of life, not rigor mortis. Analyzing our preaching, analyzing our lives, with the insights of the ethicist would strengthen our ethos and empower our people for living faith.

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## From Study to Proclamation

The Rev. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.

Long centuries ago, a student in a select school looked longingly at his teacher and begged him: "Teach us how to pray" (*Luke* 11:1). Because that particular teacher was filled with the Holy Spirit, and perhaps because his human intelligence was uniquely wed to divine Wisdom, he did teach the class how to pray: "When you pray, say . . ." (v.2).

For decades, seminarians beyond counting have looked longingly at their professors and begged them: "Teach us how to preach." And the masters in theology, presumably enlightened by the self-same Spirit, have failed to serve up a satisfying "When you preach, preach like this . . ." Some have coldly rejected the request as foreign to their function, the burden of the homiletical. Others have desperately tagged practical applications onto theological theses: a paragraph of kitchen Christology; an appendix in ecclesiology on the family as a little church; and so on weakly into the night. The theologian was not a preacher, and the homiletics professor was rarely a theologian. And so the new priest has departed the seminary with a theology that often bored him, and a course in homiletics that stressed technique, know-how, "how to." Wired for sound, not fired for proclamation.

In consequence, we continue to reap the plaintive protests of our parishioners: Why have so many priests so little to say? Aren't you "turned on" by this God you've studied so long at our expense? Whatever happened to you fellows when you "left the world"?

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Less passionately phrased, the problem might read: How do you move effectively from classroom to pulpit, from study to proclamation? There is no instant answer, no infallible injection, no universal lesson. The homily that “sends” worshippers to the vaults of St. Patrick’s Cathedral may fall flat on the grass of a rude chapel in Micronesia. No preaching pattern works for the Cure d’Ars and Norman Vincent Peale. Even you and I will preach differently from the same pulpit, to the same people. Your “style” is not my “style.”

It is not my task, therefore, to write your homily, not my task to set before you, in living color, “the very model of a modern major” homilist.<sup>1</sup> I shall attempt something far less arrogant and far more basic, something I have come to see with increasing intensity in the twilight of my life. It is my contention that between study and proclamation there is frequently a missing link. That link is experience: experience of God, experience of God’s people, experience of God’s wonderful works. And that link spells the difference between the journeyman and the master. To make this thesis perceptible and palatable, let me unfold it in three stages under three rubrics: (1) study, (2) experience, (3) proclamation.

## The Preacher Studies

First, study. By “study” I mean a searching for knowledge, a searching that is organized, disciplined, methodical. It might take a solid semester or a single hour. It might be a complete course in Christology or a serious “Saturday Night Live,” with Padre Sarducci or feverishly plundering Raymond Brown on Jesus’ enigmatic words to Pilate, “You say I am a king” (*John* 18:37).<sup>2</sup> In any event, it is a deliberate effort to learn something in student style.

Now my four decades of preaching tell me that very little I’ve studied is impertinent to preaching. From anthropology to zoology, whatever you learn about God’s creation is potential grist for your homiletic mill. Not that you study every subject, or any subject, simply to see how you can apply it to the pulpit. Such study, such “despoiling of the Egyptians,”<sup>3</sup> not only does violence to the autonomy of a science; it risks turning superficial, and it contributes little or nothing to your constant conversion. My point is, whatever you study can offer fresh insight into God’s awesome activity in the story of salvation. I recall here what the perceptive Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler found wanting in Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church in the Modern World:

<sup>1</sup>The reference is to a line in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, “The Pirates of Penzance,” (1879): “the very model of a modern major general.”

<sup>2</sup>A reference to a popular TV show.

<sup>3</sup>A favorite early Christian expression for appropriating “pagan truth” in the interests of the faith: Whatever there is of truth among you really belongs to us.

The doctrine of grace remains trapped within the rubric of redemption, while at the same time the joys, hopes, griefs and anxieties that evoke the document are most sharply delineated under the rubric of creation . . . . What is required is nothing short of a doctrine of grace elaborated as fully under the article of God the Creator as a doctrine of grace has been historically developed under the article of God the Redeemer.<sup>4</sup>

Our Catholic tradition tends to draw too hard and fast a line between nature and grace, between the secular and the sacred. The peril of too sharp a distinction is that nature and the secular can be misprized and despised. No, God's salvific story is everywhere to hear and discern: not only in "the heavens" that "are telling the glory of God" (*Psalms* 19:1) but all over our planet, from the ovum and sperm that join to shape a child to the Atari and the atom. The divine milieu, as Teilhard de Chardin saw, is not only the mystical body of Christ; it is the cosmic body of Christ. The matter of your homily, therefore, is literally without limit.

But lest this essay be limitless, I focus on two areas of study particularly pertinent for the preacher. The first is Scripture - Old Testament and New. No need to argue its peerless importance; give ear to Vatican II:

Like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must needs be nourished and governed by Sacred Scripture. In the sacred books, you see, the Father who is in heaven comes to meet His children with extraordinary love and speaks with them. So remarkable is its power and force that the word of God abides as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for the Church's children, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life.<sup>5</sup>

If that is true, if for those striking reasons all our preaching should find its direction and its sustenance in Scripture, a twin challenge confronts us. One facet is general, the other quite specific. On

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Sittler, "A Protestant Point of View," in John H. Miller, C.S.C., ed., *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966). 426. In a later article ("Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility," *Idoc*, Sept. 12, 1970, 75-85) Sittler insisted that our basic ecological error is that we Christians have separated creation and redemption. The reason why we can worship nature in Vermont and at the same time manipulate nature in New York is because, in our view, the redemption wrought by Christ leaves untouched the creation wrought by God. And once we wrench redemption from creation, once we put nature out there and grace in here, as long as we omit from our theology of grace the transaction of man and woman with nature, it is irrelevant to Christians whether we reverence the earth or ravish it.

<sup>5</sup>*Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 21.



broad lines, my homily should be recognizably biblical. For all my radiant twentieth-century rhetoric, I must confess that there is an incomparable power, an unrivaled richness, in the sheer text of Scripture. Why? Raymond Brown has put the reason pithily: "In the Bible God communicates Himself to the extraordinary extent that one can say that there is something 'of God' in the words. All other works, patristic, Thomistic, and ecclesiastic, are words *about* God; only the Bible is the word *of* God."<sup>6</sup> And the scriptural symbols, from the covenant through the kingdom to the cross, are matchless for their capacity to evoke a religious response.

But if I am to mediate the unique power of God's word to others, the Bible cannot remain a mere reference book, a handy volume of quotations for all occasions. Scripture must be the air I breathe. I must develop a love for God's word that reflects the vivid advice of St. Jerome: "When your head droops at night, let a page of Scripture pillow it."<sup>7</sup> Only so will my words too burn with Isaian fire; only so will the ancient symbols come alive on my lips; only so will the "good news" come across to the faithful as news indeed, and as very, very good.

This is highly important, this immersion in the Bible like an embryo in amniotic fluid. But by itself it is not enough; something more specific must supplement it. After all, God is not simply "talking." He is saying something: "Thus says the Lord." "Amen, amen, I say to you." To recapture what that is calls for disciplined study. What did the Lord actually mean when He proclaimed through Jeremiah: "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days . . . : I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (*Jeremiah* 31:33)? Not my personal preference for beatitudes, but why Matthew and Luke are so different; why Luke has Jesus talking about real poverty, Matthew poverty in spirit. How you reconcile the radical Jesus on riches with the moderate Jesus: the Jesus for whom wealth is "totally linked with evil."<sup>8</sup> and the Jesus who counsels a prudent use of possessions; the Jesus who tells some people to give it all away and the Jesus who advises others to share what they have; the Jesus who forces you to choose between money and God, and the Jesus who loves a rich man who keeps both his wealth and God's commandments.

I am not suggesting that to be an effective preacher you must become a professional exegete. I am not identifying what a biblical

<sup>6</sup>Raymond E. Brown, S.S., "'And the Lord Said'? Biblical Reflections on Scripture as the Word of God," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981) 3-19, at 18. The whole article should be read for its careful effort to grasp the meaning of Scripture as God's word.

<sup>7</sup>Jerome, *Letter* 22, 17.

<sup>8</sup>Josef Schmid, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Regensburg New Testament; Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba (1968))194.

text meant to its human author then with what God may be saying to you through the text now. I am even prepared to grant, with Gadamer and contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, that a so-called "classical" text, be it the Bible or a score of Chopin, "has a fullness of meaning which by its very nature can never be exhausted," that "the meaning mediated by the (classical) text actually exceeds the conscious intention of the author," that the reader's understanding can help constitute the meaning of the text, "as the interpretation of the artist is constitutive of the music."<sup>9</sup> If that is true, then the ordinary Christian, operating within the understanding of the faith community and out of his or her life experience, can grasp with the text is basically saying. "Just as one need not be a professional musician to enjoy a symphony, or a literary critic to enjoy Moby Dick, one need not be a professional exegete to understand the Gospel of Luke."<sup>10</sup>

And still you dare not disregard scholarly exegesis. Sandra Schneiders has phrased it tellingly, in the context of philosophical hermeneutics:

The advantage of the exegete is analogous to that of the professional musician. Obviously, one who can play Chopin can, other things being equal, enjoy Chopin more deeply than the musically uneducated but appreciative listener. Even more importantly, unless someone can play Chopin, the ordinary person will never have the chance to appreciate his music . . . . Through the work of exegesis the text becomes more available and more understandable, just as through the playing of the musician the music becomes more available and more enjoyable.<sup>11</sup>

If you are to preach the word of God effectively today, a double don't is in order: (1) Don't bypass the exegete. (2) Don't parrot the exegete. The paradox is startling: You are more likely to grasp what God's word says today if you have mastered what God's word meant yesterday.

The second area of study particularly pertinent for the preacher is theology. Simply because theology is the Church's ceaseless struggle to understand God's word and to express it. It is theology's privilege and burden to search out where God has spoken, where God speaks: from the burning bush of Midian to the gas ovens in Auschwitz, from the word that was creation to the Word that was made flesh, from the Church gathered in council to the skin-and-

<sup>9</sup>Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., "Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture," *Theological Studies* 39 (1978) 719-36, at 731 and 732. See H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975) esp. 235-341.

<sup>10</sup>Schneiders, "Faith" 733.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.* 734-35.



bones dying that defecate at Calcutta's curbstones, from the Book that somehow reveals the heart of God to the trace of God on the face of humanity.

It is theology's task to uncover and interpret what God has said, what God says now. It is to theologians of the past 1800 years - from Irenaeus to Rahner - that you owe your deeper understanding of so many love-laden mysteries. I mean, who Christ is: what it means to be divine and what it means to be human - both in one unique package. What the Church is: not only or primarily the hierarchy, but the whole interpersonal community united to the Father and to one another through Christ in the Spirit. What grace means: the vast, deep realm that is the relationship between a triune God and the human person. What it means to say that God has revealed Himself to us in His dying-rising Son, that God channels His life to us in the sacraments, that Christ is really present in the Eucharist, that death is not the close of life but its glorious continuance days without end.

It is not theology you preach; for the pulpit is not a classroom. But without theology you risk preaching platitudes (Remember Mayor Daley's "Chicago must rise higher and higher platitudes"?). Our homilies are rarely heretical. They fail rather because they are stale and flat, vapid and insipid, dreadfully dry and boringly barren. One reason? They are not pregnant with the inexhaustible riches that is Christ; they have so little substance, so little sap to slake the parched spirit.

## The Preacher Knows God

Serious study, therefore, is important for the preacher. Exegesis and theology exist because each word God speaks is at once mysterious and open-ended, never totally understood. Exegetes and theologians help you to take that word from wherever it is spoken, wrestle with it, feel its fire, and fling it out to people with new life, fresh flame.

But sheer study is not enough. To preach effectively, to speak God's word as Isaiah and Paul, it is not enough to know about God; I must know God. In half a century, I have learned a good deal about God. With Aquinas, I have learned that God is Immovable Mover, Uncaused Cause, Necessary Being, Absolute Perfection, Supreme End. With Paul, I have risen from "the things that have been made" to God's "invisible nature," to "His eternal power and deity" (*Romans* 1:20). With John, I believe "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (*John* 3:16) gave him to a crucifying death that I might have life. I resonate to Joseph Mary Plunkett when he sees Christ's "blood upon the rose,/ And in the stars the glory of his eyes./ His body gleams amid eternal snows,/ His tears fall from the skies."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Joseph Mary Plunkett, "I See His Blood upon the Rose," in Thomas Walsh, ed., *The Catholic Anthology: The World's Great Catholic Poetry* (rev. ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1947)428.



I thrill when I read in Gerard Manley Hopkins that I can find God in man and woman, that "Christ plays in ten thousand places,/ Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his/ To the Father through the features of men's faces."<sup>13</sup>

But believe me this is not enough. From my own checkered past, I urge on all preachers a burning, humbling question: For all you know about God, do you really know God? Several years ago Karl Rahner fashioned a moving essay in the form of a letter from Ignatius Loyola to a modern Jesuit. A significant segment of the letter has to do with Ignatius' experience of God. Here simply some excerpts:

I was convinced that first, tentatively, during my illness in Loyola and then, decisively, during my time as a hermit in Manresa I had a direct encounter with God. This was the experience I longed to communicate to others . . . . I am not going to talk of forms and visions, symbols, voices, tears and such things. All I say is I knew God, nameless and unfathomable, silent and yet near, bestowing himself upon me in his Trinity. I knew God beyond all concrete imagining. I knew him clearly in such nearness and grace as is impossible to confound or mistake . . . .

God himself: I knew God himself, not simply human words describing him . . . . This experience is grace indeed and basically there is no one to whom it is refused . . . . When I say that it is as possible to encounter God in your age as in mine, I mean God really and truly, the God of incomprehensibility, the ineffable mystery, the darkness which only becomes eternal light for the man who allows himself to be swallowed up by it unconditionally. But it is precisely this God, he and none other, whom I personally experienced as the God who comes down to us, who comes close to us, the God in whose incomprehensible fire we are not, in fact, burnt away but become ourselves and of eternal value. The ineffable God promises himself to us; and in this promise of his ineffability we become, we live, we are loved and we are of eternal value; through him, if we allow ourselves to be taken up by him, we are not destroyed but given to ourselves truly for the first time.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As kingfishers catch fire . . .," in W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, eds., *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (4th ed.; London: Oxford University, 1975)90.

<sup>14</sup>Karl Rahner, S.J., and Paul Imhof, S.J., *Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Collins, c1978)11,12,13,17.

Can you say that like Ignatius, you have truly encountered the living and true God? Can you say that you know God Himself, not simply human words that describe Him? If you cannot, I dare not conclude that you are an unproductive preacher; for the same God who “is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (*Matthew* 3:9) can use the most sere of sermons to move the obdurate heart. But I do say that if you know only a theology of God, not the God of theology, you will not be the preacher our world desperately needs.

To know God, it is not enough to memorize Mark, translate Trent, ransack Rahner. The Father, His Christ, their Spirit — these must come through to you as real persons, real as the flesh-and-blood man or woman next to you. Your personal experience of God, how God speaks to you, this is not mine to define. It may be the thunder of Sinai (*Exodus* 19:19) or the “still small voice” on Horeb (*1 Kings* 19:12). It may be the theophany to a rebellious Job, where God transpires not to defend His wisdom but to stress His mystery. It may be Francis stigmatized on Alvernia or Augustine and Monica enraptured at Ostia. It may be John of the Cross’s ascent of Carmel or Ignatius’ illumination at the Cardoner.

More likely, your encounter with God will mean that you are increasingly sensitive to four phenomenological aspects of your relationship to God in Christ.<sup>15</sup> (1) You will find yourself absorbed by a living presence, a divine activity more real than your physical surroundings. (2) You will be aware of a holy presence that fills you with awe and fear, while it warms and draws you — what Mouroux called “a kind of rhythm between hope and fear, each mutually supporting and generating the other.” (3) You will know an inexpressible loneliness; for in the presence of Love you will still be far from Love, agonizingly aware that to find yourself you must lose yourself, to grasp God you must risk all. (4) Even within sorrow you will sense a profound joy, strong and unshakable, a joy that refuses to be imprisoned, must burst forth to be shared with others.

In the last analysis, as the fourth-century theologian and mystic Gregory of Nyssa saw so perfectly, there is only one way to know God, and that is to be like Him, to get to be in His image. And so

the knowledge of God to which (Gregory) gives preference in his thinking is that of participation in His virtues, in His holiness—that knowledge which is essentially union . . . . And how to participate in that holiness of God? By following Him through faith, eyes closed, wherever He leads; by opening one’s heart always to a further

<sup>15</sup>The rest of this paragraph is indebted to Pierre Fransen, “Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace,” *Cross Currents* 8 (1958) 229-30.

<sup>16</sup>Jean Mouroux, *The Christian Experience: An Introduction to a Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954)38.



and deeper submissiveness; by divesting oneself of every favor already received through unceasing yearning for what is always beyond; in a word, by the ecstasy which is a going out of oneself . . . .<sup>17</sup>

Our people are hungry for preachers who, like Magdalene, have seen the risen Lord. My darkest moments in homiletics are not when my theology is porous. My darkest moments are when I have ceased to pray - when the familiar phrases fall trippingly from my pen and tongue but it is all rote, prepackaged, with the life-giving juices dried up. My preaching is least effective when I experience nothing - neither God's presence nor His absence.

Not unexpectedly, the same problem surges in regard to God's images on earth. My homiletic experience cries aloud that Christian anthropology is not enough. Important indeed, but insufficient. The preacher our people desperately need not only knows about man and woman. Our people need preachers who live what Aquinas put so acutely: "There are two ways of desiring knowledge. One way is to desire it as a perfection of one's self; and that is the way philosophers desire it. The other way is to desire it not (merely) as a perfection of one's self, but because through this knowledge the one we love becomes present to us; and that is the way saints desire it."

This is not to denigrate anthropology. I am simply saying that the most profound knowledge is in peril of staying sterile unless it is charged with love. My knowledge of the human condition is Christian and salvific, my insight into man and woman will find effective expression, if it touches me to the other, to the countless men and women whose days are faithless or hopeless or loveless.

The paradox is, the flow is not one way. Here is reciprocal causality, a two-way street. If knowledge leads to love, love deepens knowledge. It has taken me a lifetime to learn that love lavished on others is not time stolen from theology, from anthropology, from homiletics. Please God, you will learn, not so much from reading as from loving, how "Christ plays in ten thousand places . . . through the features of men's faces."

Something similar can be said about the rest of God's creation. It is not enough for you to plumb its secrets; you should experience the subhuman as sacred. Everything that exists, from ocean floor to outer space, is precious because it reflects the God whose whole being is summed up in a monosyllable: He is. And everything that lives from the simplest amoeba through a field of wheat to the sulphur-bottom whale, is more precious still, because it images the God who is Life. This breath-taking trace of God throughout His universe is

<sup>17</sup>This summary of Gregory stems from Roger Leys, *L'Image de Dieu chez Gregoire de Nysse* (Brussels: L'Edition Universelle, 1951) 139-40.



not yours simply to know, to recognize, to analyze. To preach persuasively, you had better love it!

Perhaps what I have said so far can be summed up neatly. A solid sermon presupposes serious study, if only because the word you preach is not so much your word as God's word; and God's word is a challenge not only to your piety but to your intelligence. But sheer study is insufficient; for to study is, in large measure, to recapture the ideas and insights, the discoveries and experiences of others. If you are to do more than parrot the exegete and theologian, if you are to touch God's living word to a living people, you have to hear that word with your own ears, see the risen Christ with your own eyes, experience for yourself the Lord God and the loving work of His hands.

Let me point up and conclude this segment on experience with a story I have borrowed from Henri Nouwen:

One day a young fugitive, trying to hide himself from the enemy, entered a small village. The people were kind to him and offered him a place to stay. But when the soldiers who sought the fugitive asked where he was hiding, everyone became very fearful. The soldiers threatened to burn the village and kill every man it unless the young man were handed over to them before dawn. The people went to the minister and asked him what to do. The minister, torn between handing over the boy to the enemy or having his people killed, withdrew to his room and read his Bible, hoping to find an answer before dawn. After many hours, in the early morning his eyes fell on these words: "It is better that one man dies than that the whole people be lost."

Then the minister closed the Bible, called the soldiers, and told them where the boy was hidden. And after the soldiers led the fugitive away to be killed, there was feast in the village because the minister had saved the lives of the people. But the minister did not celebrate. Overcome with a deep sadness, he remained in his room. That night an angel came to him and asked, "What have you done?" He said, "I handed over the fugitive to the enemy." Then the angel said, "But don't you know that you handed over the Messiah?" "How could I know?" the minister replied anxiously. Then the angel said, "If, instead of reading your Bible, you had visited this young man just once and looked into his eyes, you would have known."<sup>18</sup>

## The Preacher Shapes the Sermon

Study impregnated with experience - a powerful preparation for preaching. But as yet I do not have an actual sermon or homily; the

<sup>18</sup>Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972) 25-26. This is apparently only one version of a very ancient story.

word I shall personally proclaim has not taken shape. How shape it? No single system ensures success for all. Still, for what it is worth, let me sketch my own *modus operandi*. Here I recapture a real-life situation: the second Sunday of Advent 1982, cycle C, a homily I was asked to deliver at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

Stage 1: What shall I talk about? This is the mulling stage, the search for the subject, the general topic. It has to focus on Advent, of course. But what approach to Advent? I could fashion my homily directly from the liturgical reading (*Bar* 5:1-9,; *Phil* 1:4-6,8-11; *Lk* 3:1-6), but something else intrigues me more. I recall, from a lecture by Raymond Brown, that three persons dominate the Advent liturgy — three persons who prepare in different ways for the coming of the Savior: Isaiah, John the Baptist, Mary. And the feast of the Immaculate Conception is almost upon us — three days away. I have my topic: Advent and Mary.

Stage 2: How, in point of fact, do Advent and Mary link up? This calls for study in two areas: What is the Advent liturgy all about, and how does Mary fit into it? Advent, I find, is a period of expectation; we are waiting. For what? We focus on two events. We put ourselves back into the situation of an expectant people, on tiptoe for the first coming of the Messiah; and we rekindle our expectation of his final coming. Baruch waits for the first coming, Paul for the final.

And what of Mary? As I search the Scriptures and canvass the commentaries, I conclude that Mary and Advent fit together strikingly. Not primarily because we celebrate Mary's birthday on September 8, subtract nine months, and celebrate her conception on December 8. Mary is an Advent figure because she reveals more remarkably than anyone else how the Christian should wait for Christ. First, the way she waited for Christ's first coming. Not only like every other Jew waited for the Promised One. She waited uniquely, as no other in history: He for whom she was waiting was nestling within her, in her flesh. She was waiting only to see his face and to offer him to the world. Second, the way Mary waited for Christ's second coming. In a word, she was his disciple — the very model of what discipleship means. "My mother and my brothers, they are the ones who listen to the word of God and act on it" (*Luke* 8:21). That, at its best, is Mary: she who hears God's word and does it. Such was Mary at the Gospel's beginning; such was she throughout her life (check this theme in *Luke*); such was she beneath the cross; such was she after the ascension of her Son, waiting with the Eleven for the descent of the Spirit.

Stage 3: How organize all this? It seems to suggest three points, three questions. The first two stem naturally from my study: (1) What is the Advent liturgy all about? Expectant waiting for Christ. (2) How



does Mary fit into Advent? History's most remarkable model of waiting: She listened to the word of God and acted on it. But a third question challenges not my study but my experience: What does Mary say to us these Advent weeks? She shows us how to wait for Christ. Not only for his second coming, "with great power and glory" (*Mark* 13:26); for his constant coming each day, in poverty and powerlessness that make his crib look like a castle. This is not pious poetry; it is the word of God. Jesus comes to us in the hungry and thirsty, in the stranger and the naked, in the sick and the shackled (cf. *Matthew* 25:35-40). The hungers of the human family cry out to us: hunger for bread, for justice and peace, for understanding and love—hunger for God. Their cry is not only a human cry; God is speaking to us. We are Jesus' disciples, in the image of Mary, only if we listen to that anguished word and act on it, as God gives us to act.

Stage 4: I develop each point in detail, compose in organized fashion, order my ideas with rigor and vigor. Here clarity, for all its importance, is not enough. A homily is not a catechism, not a theology text, not a curial rescript; it calls for a religious response. And so I struggle with language, wrestle with words; Webster's Unabridged is my second bible. I pause to read Shakespeare aloud, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T.S. Eliot, Tennessee Williams. I listen to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony or Barber's Adagio, a ballet like *Swan Lake* or a dash of country music. For the bare message can be deadeningly dull; it must come alive, take wing. To play on the human heart, my words must leap and dance, quiver and shiver, burn and cool. That is why, when I speak to my Advent people about the hunger of the human family, I move briskly from abstractions to "the living skeletons in Mother Teresa's Calcutta and the downtrodden in D. C., the bombed-out in Lebanon and the MX in Wyoming, the slums in El Salvador and the pimps and prostitutes in Times Square, the schizoid psyches in St. Elizabeth's and the lonely old on your street."

But for my words to come alive, *I* must come alive. Which drives me back, time and again, not to study but to experience; How do I touch God in love, feel the scars of His people, trace His face in sky and earth?

Stage 5: When I think I've finished, I work through every sentence of the homily with a very fine comb. I don't need this much on Isaiah, that extra phrase on John the Baptist. A purple patch here, a bit too subtle there. Block that metaphor, excise that hackneyed expression, lessen the alliteration. Not a single needless word.

I have mapped out one man's movement from study through experience to proclamation. If it strikes you as onerous and time-consuming, I shall not quarrel with you; it takes me sixty or seventy hours to shape a fifteen-minute homily. But, I assure you, the results outstrip the price: for your people, time and again fresh insight into



the mind of Christ, often a burning yearning to listen to the Lord and say yes; for yourself, a continuing education, ever-new experience of the risen Christ, constant conversion. Yes, conversion; for you will soon discover that in the first instance you are preaching to yourself. The people will listen more eagerly, to the Lord and His preacher, if the preacher has seen the Lord's face.

Let me leave you with a comforting thought — comforting and unexpectedly practical. There is hardly an experience in your day that is not grist for your proclamation. I do not mean that you carry a notebook, jot down every single thing that passes for real. I do mean that everything you see, hear, touch, taste, and smell is part of your human and Christian experience, can therefore shape the word you preach and the way you preach it. "Chariots of Fire", "On Golden Pond", and "E.T."; the photo of Mother Teresa cradling a naked retarded child in West Beirut; the Op. Ed. page and the debate on nuclear morality; the taste of cannelloni and the cool breeze caressing your cheek; thousands of Cambodian refugees ravaged by tuberculosis, dysentery, malaria; the latest in song hits and the complaints of your people; the touch of a hand, the feel of a flower, the look of love in another's eyes and a thousand more combine to fashion the person you are. Let them fashion your homily as well. In this way your life and your preaching will sing the joyous eucharist of the poet E. E. Cummings:

I thank You God for most this amazing day: for the  
leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue true dream of  
sky; and for everything which is natural which is infinite  
which is yes

(I who have died am alive again today, and this is the  
sun's birthday; this is the birth day of life and of love and  
wings: and of the gay great happening illimitably earth)

How should tasting touching hearing seeing breathing  
any — lifted from the no of all nothing — human merely  
being doubt unimaginable You?

(Now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my  
eyes are opened)<sup>19</sup>

This, at bottom, is your homily: thanksgiving for most this amazing day, for everything which is natural, for everything which is infinite, for everything which is yes. So be it!

<sup>19</sup>E. E. Cummings, Poem 95 in *100 Poems*.

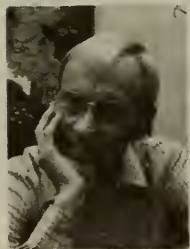
## Action in the Art of Preaching

J. Phillip Swander

In my lifetime preaching has not held its rightful place among the arts. An understanding of its nature as an art has been lost. Perhaps its nature as an art has never been understood. Certainly, the Art of Preaching is not taught or practiced.

It is time. It is time that preaching be understood, understood for what it is, in and of itself. It is time if it is to be worthy of the biblical materials to which it is primarily responsible. It is time if it is to release that material into people's lives in such a way that they are claimed: challenged, changed, and made glad. It is time, if it is to be liberated from that which passes as preaching and is passed along as preaching. It is time if we are all to understand that what we habitually experience as preaching is not preaching.

Preaching is commonly understood, thought of and practiced, as a literary endeavor. It is no such thing. It is in many ways the antithesis. Misconception is fostered and encouraged by education which is visually oriented and dominated by print. In our education we learn to read and to write. Then we are taught to learn by reading silently and writing about what we have read. Whether we are securing in our minds what we have learned, whether we are giving expression to what we have learned to prove we have learned it, or whether the freedom "to express ourselves" is being encouraged, in each case we are guided to write. From the early education days of beginning themes of "My Pet" or "My Favorite Hobby" to the seminary experience, a student will have been encouraged to write, write, write. When the seminary student enters the first homiletics course, he or she is told once again to write, to write a sermon - more, he or she is



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instructed in how to write a sermon. The student is never told: At this moment you enter a different arena. Preaching is an art more of the ear than of the eye. No longer can you rely upon writing as the primary form of expression.

A sermon does not belong to the art of writing. A sermon belongs to the art of the spoken word. Preaching and the sermon are dependent upon basic elements which constitute a singular art of the spoken word: the Art of Preaching. Writing functions to serve that art, but the art of preaching is not similar, nor is it dependent upon the art of writing. Preaching is a special and distinct art form. It asks us to recognize its nature, and to restore its integrity. Its reason for being is to serve the Word. It is we who must be servant of the art.

Preachers are called to the art of preaching. To be or become a preacher means to submit oneself willingly to the fundamental elements characteristic of the art, to be guided and trained by the discipline they impose. You may well ask, "Why?" The most simple and sincere answer is, "It works!" The nature of the elements of the art conform to the nature of the biblical material they serve. In practice, they release the power of the text, and they release and develop the abilities and talent that each person brings to them. If you are to find yourself as a preacher, you must give yourself to the art. Submission to the discipline of the art is the demand of all its elements. If you are dedicated to releasing the power of the Word, you will find willingness.

The essential idea of preaching, its fundamental element, is action. Preaching is an art of the spoken word, a dramatic art, an art of action or doing. If the word *dramatic* sets your ears to tingling, let me calm you. Keep in mind that the word drama derives from a Greek word meaning deed. The verb form translates "to do," "to act" - to act, to do something. Not to "play-act." Be clear on that point. I am not suggesting that preaching be theatrical, nor do I have in mind the rant and rave romp with scripture that characterizes some pulpit behavior.

I am speaking of that which is normal and natural to us all. As human beings, action is not second nature to us. It characterizes us. Action is the core of our nature. We are beings of action. From birth to death, from morn to night and all night long, we are in action, doing something. We do something when we do nothing.

To speak is to act. You cannot speak and not do something. It is, therefore, foolhardy and dangerous to speak and not know what you are doing. In truth, if you do not know what you are doing, you do not know what you are saying. That is a grave matter. It is unfortunate for the spiritual tenor of our times that Descartes did not say, "I act. Therefore I am." To think is an action, an inner action. To speak is an action, an external action. We think and speak in order to do, to do things, to act. We think and speak in the act of doing.



Action is at the core of spoken communication, action communicated primarily through vocalized sounds in words chosen to carry the action into the ears and bodies of others to prompt reaction.

What is meant is basic. It is so obvious that it is overlooked, of if not overlooked, not clearly understood. If our wish to connect with another is genuine, if we care, we choose what we do, we think it through before we do it, in order to choose the words we will use and how we will use them to evoke the response we strive for. We only know what best to say and how best to say it, if we know what best to do to achieve the result we hope for. It is crucial for preaching that this link between doing and speaking be recovered and developed. It must become a conscious and intentional part of the preacher's equipment.

Actions are in and of the body. They originate and are experienced internally as well as manifested externally. When I speak of action, you may immediately think of external body movements, gestures and movements of the body that are easily seen. The Art of Preaching, however, draws attention to that which goes on internally. The preacher must become consciously aware of how we think and experience action as a primitive base for what we speak. An indispensable part of the preacher's equipment is what I call a sense of action.

Actions are aroused by emotions and actions arouse emotions. Actions trigger thought and are triggered by thought. All actions can be selected, focused and disciplined by thought. They are so much the property of thought, that it is safe to say that a disciplined mind thinks action, the nature of which is experienced in the muscles and viscera of the body, warmed by emotion. So, in action, we experience a union of mind, muscle and emotion.

Actions happen in the stuff of which we are made. They provide us an immediate experience of self. They are the way to being actively and immediately present. It is out of this body base that one speaks with honesty, simplicity and power. The preacher must learn to "think with the body" and to speak out of the body.

The power pregnant in preaching, the power waiting to be unleashed in the spoken word, is dependent upon physical "rootedness." The preacher must be physically aware and physically available to his people. He must be physically present in the Presence. It is not enough, as is so often the case, to be there *in absentia*.

Speaking words well ordered to communicate an idea well developed is not enough. Speaking words does not communicate meaning, your meaning. Being consciously aware of your actions, knowing what you are doing, as a base of what you are saying, is the only true way to honest, simple expressiveness, expression of self and the use of self to express other materials. If you lose a sense of the connection between your words and the action, you will speak "from the head out the mouth." Your body will be dead. Your involvement

will be partial. You will not be present. Potential hearers will remain passive listeners or become mere auditors. You will not be preaching.

Action. Doing. The fundamental elements of preaching. As simple as that. Preaching, at its core, is doing things. Simple, yet a disturbing number of folks find it difficult. Their native awareness of action has been encouraged to lay dormant. Their sense of action has been dulled. If you find that you are among this number, do not despair. The ability is there waiting to be awakened.

If I suggest that you tease someone, you will know what to do, won't you? And you will find appropriate words to do it. If I suggest that you praise someone, you will know what to do. And you will choose words that will help you do it. Possible actions are as many as verb forms are possible, as your imagination is fertile, and as your understanding of human nature is rich and provocative. Let me give a few commonplace examples: to suggest, to point out, to guess, to doubt, to wonder, to consider, to decide, to weight, to search one's mind, to "hit upon," to "try on for size," to recall, to savor, to delight in, to confess, to hide, to unmask, to hesitate, to ponder, to ruminate.

All of these are actions in which most of us engage frequently, and they are suitable to enliven any sermon. What do you know of each action? Do you know its nature, the experience of it? Or is each only a term, a word to be spoken, a symbol of something with which you are only intellectually acquainted?

Take time to have some fun. Try each action. Speak each aloud. How do you suggest something? What is the subtle muscle awareness of "suggesting" in the body? What happens in the voice? Is there any difference between the actions of to suggest and to decide? Use the words "to decide" to try to discover first-hand information of yourself as a person involved in the act of deciding. What does it feel like in the body, what are you thinking? How does the voice sound? For further exercising, compose simple sentences which express the above actions without using the words which name the actions.

Now think about this. When you say "hello" to someone, what are you doing? If you don't know, can you do it? If you don't know what you are doing, when you say "hello" to someone, can you say it? If you don't know what you are doing, how will you say it? What will be heard? What will be seen? What will you be listening for? What will you be looking for? Will you be present in the "hello"? How will you use yourself? What will be the set of the body, the expression of the face, the color of the voice, the intonation of the voice, the placement of the stress? All depends on what you want to do with that "hello". Do you want to greet? Greet "in welcome", or greet "in passing?" Is it a "I don't give a damn about" greeting? How do you want to do that "hello?" What do you want to do *with* that "hello?"

Go back over the above paragraph. Spend some time with it. Give thought to the questions it raises and the points that those



questions make. Try to come to terms with how important it is to know what your action is in order to say the one word “hello.”

To further your awareness of the importance of action in spoken communication, let’s use the three words *I love you*. You see the words on the page before you. I dare say you think you know what they mean. Life may have taught you to be cautious, but at least you will register some idea of their meaning. But when spoken, they can fill with exact but different meanings. The same words spoken communicate messages that are different. The action behind the words can change. Therefore, the way in which they are spoken, or sounded, changes. What the listener hears and understands as meaning changes. If the action is “to embrace,” the listener hears one thing. But if the action is “to fish for,” to fish for the return remark, “I love you, too,” the listener hears meaning which is quite different. Starting with the above two actions, let me give you a list of possible actions that change the way in which the phrase, “I love you,” is sounded and so communicates different meanings.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Words Spoken</i>	<i>The “Ad Lib”</i>
To embrace	I love you.	(I’m glad!)
To Fish for	I love you.	(Do you love me?)
To Protest	I love you.	(Can’t you hear me?)
To Insist	I love you.	(Whatever you may think!)
To Revel	I love you.	(I’m in heaven!)
To Lust	I love you.	(I want you!)
To Despair	I love you.	(I wish I didn’t!)
To Give In	I love you.	(There’s nothing I can do.)

Knowing the action determines how the words are spoken, or sounded. The meaning changes, yet the meaning is clear, and communicated definitively by the manner of speaking.

Use the list above as an exercise. Look at the actions, one at a time. Spend time with each. Do you know the action? Its nature? Listen for it with your inner ear. Have you ever experienced it? Have you done it yourself? Have you heard someone else do each action? Listen for the action of the body. Does it begin to whisper itself in your muscles? Sound the words, *I love you* out of the body base of each action. You will hear in your ear and feel in your muscles whether you have found the action or not. Keep at it and be of good cheer. It takes time and willingness to reawaken your native sense of action. Treat it as a game. Have fun and faith. You will make progress.



The third column of chart above, headed the "Ad Lib," introduces a helpful way of hearing "in the mind's ear" the tone of the action you wish to speak. It is a way of speaking tone so that you can hear it and feel for it, capture it in the body. For example, the column above, if I am unsure of my action "to embrace," I speak aloud the words "I'm glad!" I may play with it even more and say, "I love you and I'm glad! Hurray! It's wonderful!" I do this until I have found the positive spirit with which I wish to speak forth "I love you" in the action "to embrace." When I have found it, found the tone of the action, I speak the words, "I love you" out of the reinforced body base for the action. And so I work back and forth until the words "I love you" sound the tone of the action. I catch the tone of the action in my practice with the "ad lib" and invest it in the words I want to speak to the listener. Practice the use of the "ad lib." It will build your sense of action.

Now let's consider a short section of a sermon to further understand action, primary element in the art of preaching, and hear how a sense of action functions.

"I am bound for the promised land I am bound for the promised land. Oh, who will come and go with me? I am bound for the promised land."

The old negro spiritual captures the drive, the expectation, the joy of God's people about to enter their long-delayed inheritance. This is the kind of joy that we have to share today."

The sermon begins with four lines from a negro spiritual. How is the speaker to do it? Immediately following the spiritual he says that it "captures the drive, the expectation, the joy of God's people about to enter their long-delayed inheritance." Then he says, "This is the kind of joy that we have to share today." We hear that the preacher has an evaluating appreciation for the piece. His words also tell us something about the experience we hearers should have when the spiritual is spoken. How is that experience to come about? The speaker must discover the life of the piece, the actions that lie behind the words. Let's do it.

First, is there an overall action behind the four lines? The words "promised land" tell me of something to be desired. That's where I'm bound. *Bound*. The word is open, lush. The main sounds are the 'a' and 'oh', coupled together. They are preceded by a sound that is made up front on the lips and followed by a nasal that floats on the breath, before terminating in the lightly exploded 'd' sound. Speak the word, "bound," aloud. Go on, try it. Speak it aloud several times while listening to and "tasting" the sounds. Do you hear it? The sound seems to say not only that "I am bound" but that I bound, I leap to the promised land. I cannot stop saying where I am bound. I

say it three times. That suggests ecstasy. In the third line the “oh” and the “go,” wide open sounds, sound the impulse to fling wide the arms. The pattern of rhythmic stress encourages me to speak with abandon. Responding to all the above as I speak the lines aloud, listening with my ears and body for the life of the piece, I realize it is asking me to exult. That is the overall action of the “big action,” as I like to call it. Now I begin to know the piece. I have the feeling that it has found me out, too.

But there is more to be done. The “big action” is not enough “to do on” without the danger of leveling the piece. All four lines cannot be spoken in the same way. Additional shades of meaning are present and can be found. There are more actions available, true to the piece.

- |           |                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| 1st line: | To declare (Nothing can stop me!) |
| 2nd line: | To thank (Praise the Lord!)       |
| 3rd line: | To invite (Everybody come!)       |
| 4th line: | To rejoice (Hallelujah!)          |

I have found what I need. Now, I can do the piece. As I practice, the words become action. I no longer have to think, “What’s my action?” The action is in the words. The words, whether recalled or glanced at on paper, cue the action. I see them or hear them in my mind’s ear, and I am “in” the action.

After speaking four lines of the spiritual, the minister has written for himself to say, “The old spiritual captures the drive, the expectation, the joy of God’s people about to enter into their long-delayed inheritance. This is the kind of joy that we have to share.” What’s his action? We have only his words to go by. Did he choose what to do and the words to help him do it? The words, their form and tone, lead me to the action “to appraise.” The minister appraises the spiritual and its quality of joy. A reasonable thing to do. But is it the best thing to do? Did he actually decide to do it or did he simply fall into doing it because he was dealing with an idea, with no sense of action.

“To appraise,” with the words and form called forth, is an action that departs from the nature of what the spiritual can do. It doesn’t make use of, build on, the tone of the spoken spiritual and the thoughts and feelings it arouses in the hearts of the hearers. It breaks with the experience. It aborts the line of movement. Yet the spiritual is only the beginning of the first sequence and is spoken because of what it gets started, so to speak. What does the spiritual start? What does it ask for? The minister’s own words hint at it. It asks to be appreciated, to be enjoyed. For preacher and hearer the reaction to the spiritual is “to joy in.” That tells us that we need to re-script. We

need a script in which action resides. Here is a suggestion. The minister speaks the spiritual and then says:

“There we have it . . . the drive, the expectation, the joy of God’s people . . . the kind of joy we have to share!”

With “There we have it,” he gifts his people by embracing the piece. Then he joys in the piece. Then he relishes “the kind of joy we have to share.”

The sermon is “off and running” with the minister and the people in homiletical partnership. The preacher wants the response of the people. He needs their response. Without it the first sequence of the sermon “will go down the drain.” And it is up to the preacher to engage the people and promote their response.

But why was the script wrong in the first instance. First, the minister was not scripting for a sermon. He was writing. He was writing to be read, not writing to be heard. He took too much for granted. He did not “live” the spiritual. He thought to himself that he knew what it meant. He had a feeling for it. Yes, he could read it. But he did not know the piece. He had not gotten inside it. He had not allowed the piece to get inside him. And so, he did not move into the action of the spiritual. But instead of moving into the action, he stepped out of it. He chose—without awareness—a secondary action. He stepped aside, as it were, picked up a pointer, and began to point out, to analyze from the sidelines. He became the instructor, the one who appraises and evaluates. He lost the value of the spiritual. He led his people out of the action, out of the life of the piece. And he separated himself out from his congregation by becoming the instructor. Had he had an active sense of action, he would not have written himself into such a predicament.

Now, I know that you are not used to thinking in this way. When written out for the purpose of making more clear what is meant by action and a sense of action, it may seem complicated, even difficult to some of you. It is not. With practice, your own dormant awareness of the relationship between action and word will be awakened; your skill will grow. So will your joy in preaching. There is no escaping the reality of action. It is the primary element of the Art of Preaching.



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## Book Reviews

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### *Preaching Christian Doctrine*

William J. Carl, III

Fortress Press, 1984 Paper, 167 pages \$8.95

Dr. William Carl, a former professor of homiletics at Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, is now pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, Texas.

Homileticians are inclined to divide textbooks on preaching into two basic types. One is the "here is how I do it" textbook. It tends to be eclectic, vague, somewhat autobiographical and controlled by the experience and practice of the author. The other kind of book, the more ambitious undertaking, attempts to articulate some central core of preaching theory and then allows that theoretical core to generate guidelines for practice.

This kind of homiletics textbook is rare, but William Carl's *Preaching Christian Doctrine* is one of those. It was born in the seminary classroom and tested in the fire of experience in the pastorate. No easy "how to do it" book, *Preaching Christian Doctrine* has already gained the respect of the homiletic community. It is used by some of Dr. Carl's former colleagues in homiletics at Duke, Union, Emory, and Louisville.

As an organizing principle, Carl uses and reverses Emil Brunner's three sources of dogmatics, giving them the order of importance for preaching. Using the biblical text as his starting point, he gives the exegetical element first place. Next he moves to the catechetical and polemical dimensions, and concludes with the apologetic. The book's major chapter titles reflect this organization: Doctrine and the Bible; Doctrine in Sacrament, Season and Creed; and Doctrine and Culture.

Beginning with an analysis of the audience and the basic problem of using theological language in the pulpit, the book moves through the three starting points for a doctrinal sermon: text, doctrine and question or statement arising in church and culture. In this

movement, preaching is kept grounded in scripture and centered on Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church.

Embedded in a section on preaching the Christian year there is a statement that could serve as the theme for the entire book: "... we do not really preach the church year, but Christ, for every season points to him, to some aspect of his person and work... our main goal is to preach Christ in all his humility and in all his glory."

This is a book which will not only inform the preacher and improve the preaching, it is likely to speak effectively to the preacher's intellectual and spiritual life as well. It is a book written not simply for the mind of the preacher but for the preacher's soul as well.

Chaplain (COL) Clarence L. Reaser  
USA

### ***The New International Version Study Bible***

Kenneth Baker, General Editor

Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985 Hardcover 1950 pp. \$34.95

The NIV Study Bible was the brainchild of some of the translators of the NIV. The work was done by a transdenominational team of scholars who all "confess the authority of the Bible as God's infallible word to humanity." The names of all contributors and their areas of work are listed in the front matter of the book. Their work as a whole reflect a traditional evangelical theological perspective.

The Bible students who have asked why so many versions might also ask why so many study Bibles? There are multitudes of both. Therefore, both questions are in order, and make all the more insistant the question: Why the NIV Study Bible? The publishers answer with the following:

1. Although not the only study Bible with the NIV text, it is the only one specifically prepared for the text.
2. It is more comprehensive than any other study Bible. It boasts 1) more than twice as many study notes, 2) the largest concordance ever, 3) complete introductions and outlines for every book, 4) sixty maps, the majority specifically designed and placed throughout the text, 5) thirty-five specifically designed charts, diagrams, and drawings, and 6) sizeable subject and map indexes.

My examination of the volume leads me to agree with these claims. I would add that its comprehensiveness does not make it a monstrous book. Its size is manageable, and the print is easily read.

The editors claim to take an approach which indicates significant differences of opinion where these occur appears to be genuine.

The notes on *Hebrews* 6:4-6 list three different interpretations of this difficult passage. The note to *Revelation* 20:2 lists the different views regarding the millennium.

In my use of the book, I have noticed only a few negative aspects:

1. The numerous letters indicating cross-references or textual notes make the text rather busy.

2. The notes contain no introduction to the Bible as a whole or to the Old and New Testaments respectively.

3. The editors' commitment to follow the evidence in dealing with problems in the book introductions is sometimes weak, and their conclusions are at times biased toward the traditional approach. One example of the last problem is the dismissal of the view that *Isaiah* of Jerusalem wrote only chapters 1-39 of the book of *Isaiah* as we know it with the statement, "many scholars today challenge the claim that *Isaiah* wrote the entire book that bears his name." Saying this implies that there is no evidence for the "challenge," and this totally false.

Another example of this trend is found in a statement in the introduction to the *Book of Daniel*: "The widely held view that the book of *Daniel* is largely fictional rests mainly on the modern philosophical assumption that long-range predictive prophecy is impossible." This statement implies that to hold a late date for *Daniel* is also to view the book as "fictional." It also implies that the view was created out of a bias predictive prophecy without any good evidence to support it. Again, such is simply not true.

I make these criticisms not to assert that the editors should espouse the critical views rather than the traditional ones, but rather to suggest that the editors should be honest with the facts and permit the reader to struggle with the issues rather than to imply that there are no issues.

I am using The NIV Study Bible as the text from which to teach Old and New Testament survey classes at the college level, and I am using it for my own study and devotional reading. I would quickly recommend its purchase - to a student for academic purposes and to a preacher for homiletical use.

Chaplain (1LT) Walter E. Brown  
890th Engineer Battalion  
MS ARNG



***Fundamentals of Preaching***

John Killinger

Fortress Press, 1985 Paper, 222 pages.

For fifteen years John Killinger was Professor of Preaching, Worship, and Literature at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Nashville, Tennessee. He is now pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Lynchburg, Virginia.

The first draft of this volume was produced during the author's last semester of teaching and filed away for the first two years of his new pastorate in Virginia. After these two years, he set about the revision of the initial draft and preparation for publication. The result, as he puts it, is "a book about preaching by a professor of preaching, who is supposed to know all there is to know about such things, revised by a parish minister, who knows what it is really like to be on the firing line every Sunday." It is, he continues, "a faithful tour through one man's process of preparing his sermons."

It certainly is a vital, helpful tour. Its chapters move through the historical, biblical, and personal scope of preaching; then on to the practical business of sermon construction - startings and stoppings, illustrations, style and delivery - and finally arrive at the crux of the matter, Jesus Christ, the person behind the sermon.

This is a remarkably good book. It deals with all the dimensions of preaching in a very few pages. This has to be one of the best and most portable how-to books on preaching yet published. Chaplains who own it will use it for a long time.

Chaplain (COL) William E. Paul, Jr.  
USA Retired

***Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons***

James W. Cox

Harper &amp; Row, San Francisco, 1985. Hardbound, 299 pages, \$18.95.

Professor James W. Cox of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, has written an excellent manual on preaching for both the active practitioner and student. His comprehensive work intends to help both "to preach with solid biblical and theological content; to preach sermons that engage both heart and mind; and to preach interestingly, persuasively, and with integrity." To achieve this goal Cox defines his rationale for proclamation by considering both the context and the content of preaching, as well as the art of making and delivering sermons. He argues for freedom and variety of

styles, and he does not favor imitation as a method of developing an individual preacher's approach.

Good preaching is proclamation, witness, teaching, and prophecy. The preacher possesses special authority to speak. This authority is earned, conferred, shared and always has the possibility of being lost.

One of the most valuable aspects of Professor Cox's book is the chapter which deals with structural options. He analyzes numerous examples of sermon outlines, each with its own special strength and purpose. The outline has a living, intentional, form shaped by the text and the preacher's creativity. The author uses sermons from well known preachers to illustrate different organizational types.

The chapter which deals with story telling technique is the weakest. Professor Cox does not explore the new homiletical techniques developed by Tom Long of Princeton or Don Wardlaw of McCormick Seminary as one might expect. However, this weakness does not seriously degrade the value of the work.

Cox's *Preaching* deserves to be read. It is a refresher course in every aspect of the sermon-making art, from text to delivery. His vivid style captured my attention, and I found the substance to be entirely practical. The book ranks with H. Davis Grady's *Design for Preaching* (1958) and John Killinger's *Fundamentals of Preaching* (1958).

Chaplain (MAJ) William L. Hufham  
USA

### ***Offense to Reason: The Theology of Sin***

Bernard Ramm

Harper and Row, 1985 Hardcover, 187 pp. \$15.95

Bernard Ramm teaches theology at American Baptist Seminary of the West. He has written extensively on theological subjects.

Twelve years ago, Karl Menniger asked, "Whatever happened to sin?" Ramm assures us sin is alive and well but living under a variety of assumed names. Sin is not a popular subject for people, and so we have renamed it, tried to explain it away, and we have avoided responsibility for it. But no matter what we do, it will not go away.

We need not be religious to realize that something is terribly wrong with the world; neither need we be thoroughly secularized to deny responsibility for it. Ramm presents several modern attempts to explain away evil and shows how each has undercut the Christian doctrine of sin. Ramm's list reads like a who's who of modern thought: Spinoza, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Camus. Ramm demonstrates that the Christian teaching on sin treats

a concern of the entire human race and does so better and more completely than any alternative.

Ramm develops his doctrine of sin from the Bible. According to Ramm, we can only understand the enormity of sin in the light of the cross of Jesus. All human beings are sinful, our predicament is desperate, and we are guilty before God for our actions. Ramm rejects, however, the Augustinian linking of Adam with the rest of humanity on the basis of *Romans* 5:12-21. He looks at the various understandings of *Genesis* 3, and comes down in favor of a generic interpretation of Adam, the Fall, and sin. Ramm does not deny that Adam was an historical person, but says he was also a generic person. He defends this view as being Paul's view as well.

But sin is of practical concern as well. Sin's effects are temporal as well as spiritual. Ramm follows Calvin in saying that the image of God in man has been distorted by sin but not destroyed by sin. The reality of sin, for example, forces us to be pessimistic about human progress. Interesting enough, Ramm discusses the penetration of sin to every aspect of human existence specifically in terms of art.

Ramm's discussion of various theological treatments of sin includes an analysis and appraisal of the work of Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Barth, Tillich and the Liberation Theologians. He finds each wanting in some respect or other and returns to the argument of Pascal for his foundation. Ramm argues, with Pascal, that the Christian doctrine of sin is necessary for us to correctly see ourselves and the world. Without the doctrine of sin cannot understand literature, politics, economics, sociology, philosophy or science.

Ramm concludes with two basic assertions. First, again following Pascal, he says we take offense at being thought sinners, yet we cannot understand ourselves if we deny it. Second, Christianity is not alone in seeing that something is terribly wrong with the human race.

Ramm's book brings the reader face-to-face, as it were, with sin; but it does much more. He clearly presents the central ideas from a number of difficult thinkers as he surveys modern philosophical and theological accounts of sin and evil. He does an excellent job of balancing the personal and societal aspects of sin. He is weakest when he deals with the biblical account of the Fall as he attempts to maintain the consequences of a traditional doctrine of sin despite rejecting its Augustinian core.

This is an excellent seminary text. It joins brevity with clarity and comprehensiveness. In addition, any chaplain inclined to discount the effects of sin in the world, the church, the military, or in his or her personal life, will find the book a not-so-gentle corrective.

Chaplain (CPT) Douglas McCready  
Pennsylvania Army National Guard



***Bringing Out the Best in People***

Alan Loy McGinnis

Augsburg, 1985 Paper, 191 pages.

Dr. Alan Loy McGinnis is codirector of Valley Counseling Center in Glendale, California. He holds degrees from Wheaton, Columbia, Princeton and Fuller. He is author of the best-selling book, *The Friendship Factor*. He is a popular speaker for television, radio, and corporate audiences.

*Bringing Out the Best in People* is an enjoyable book and easy to read. The author follows a simple outline and writes in an anecdotal style. As I read the book, I could picture him standing before an audience, telling them with great authority, his ideas and his stories.

McGinnis outlines twelve rules for bringing out the best in people:

1. Expect the best from the people you lead.
2. Make a thorough study of the other person's needs.
3. Establish high standards for excellence.
4. Create an environment where failure is not fatal.
5. If they are going anywhere near where you want to go, climb on other people's bandwagons.
6. Employ models to encourage success.
7. Recognize and applaud achievement.
8. Employ a mixture of positive and negative reinforcement.
9. Appeal sparingly to the competitive urge.
10. Place a premium on collaboration.
11. Build into the group an allowance for storms.
12. Take steps to keep your own motivation high.

There is nothing new here, but McGinnis makes it enjoyable to be reminded of these principles. This would be a good book for chaplains to order and to share with NCO's and commanders. It could also provide useful material for the chaplain's use in a one or two hour course on leadership.

Chaplain (LTC) Richard N. Donovan  
USA

***What Are They Saying About  
The Social Setting of the New Testament?***

Carolyn Osiek, R.S.C.J.

Paulist Press, 1984 Paper, 102 pages \$3.95

Sister Carolyn Osiek is associate professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois. She holds a doctorate in New Testament and Christian Origins from Harvard University and is an associate editor of *The Bible Today* and *Scripture in the Church*. She has written commentaries on Galatians,

Philippians, and First Corinthians, as well as numerous articles on biblical studies, spirituality, women in the church, and the social world of early christianity.

In this book Sister Carolyn Osiek leads the reader through the world of the first century Mediterranean culture to show what the first Christian believers brought with them, so to speak, into the first Christian communities. She employs selected guidebooks from a rapidly expanding and scholarly literature to summarize some of the principal approaches and discoveries of the social and sociological study of the New Testament.

In Part I she examines the “merging cultures” of Jew and Greek in the first century of the Christian era and provides some “comparative models (from) cultural anthropology . . .” by which to better understand the “formative (years) setting of Jesus’ ministry.” Part II looks at the people who became involved in the Christian movement, concentrating on backgrounds, motivations, and social patterns. A particularly interesting chapter deals with “some of the social factors in the life of Paul and in the churches he founded.” Part III considers the sexual identity and role functions of the earliest Christians with regard to the family and church organization.

This book is an expert and informative critical review of what has been published by various scholars on this subject of historical as well as of immediate interest. The book belongs in the libraries of chaplains and chapels as a helpful resource for preaching, Bible study, and religious education.

Chaplain (COL) William E. Paul, Jr.  
USA Retired

### ***The Nibble Theory***

Kaleel Jamison

Paulist Press, 1984 Hardcover, 74 pages \$4.95

Kaleel Jamison is an organizational development consultant to business and industry. An experienced human relations trainer, she has published many articles on personal and organizational change.

Each person is unique and possesses a “kernel of power” that is the key to self-understanding and self-empowerment. This is the central idea of Kaleel Jamison’s book. The title of the book refers to the ways people are ordinarily diminished by themselves and others.

Jamison’s book sets forth a theory of self-empowerment and leadership with arresting simplicity and warmth. Using circles of different sizes to represent individual personalities, the author shows how we are “nibbled” by ourselves and by others. But understanding nibbles and how to avoid them is only half the process.

The deeper and more difficult part is in the process of finding what it is that makes us who we are. This process is from the inside out and is often accompanied by pain and struggle. But according to the author, the fulfilling of our unique potential is our own "sacred responsibility" in living.

While not directed to any specific audience, religious people will find *The Nibble Theory* illuminating and inspiring; managers and leaders will find it engaging and useful. It is uncommonly valuable to all interested in knowing themselves and their place in the human family. Its simplicity, universality and depth make it well worth several readings.

Chaplain (MAJ) Geoffrey H. Moran  
USA

***The Bible In The Churches:  
How Different Christians Interpret the Scriptures***  
Kenneth Hagen, *et al.*

Paulist Press, 1985 Paper, 148 pages \$8.95

Kenneth Hagen, a Lutheran, teaches theology at Marquette University; Daniel J. Harrington, a Roman Catholic, teaches New Testament at Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Grant R. Osborne, an Evangelical Protestant, teaches New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois; and Joseph A. Burgess, a Lutheran, is Executive Director, Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., New York City.

Representing three major theological interpretations of the Bible, three scholars from Roman Catholicism, Evangelicalism, and Lutheranism speak for their respective traditions. The writers provide explanations for how they interpret scripture, a history of that interpretation, and a conclusion which compares and contrasts the various approaches.

As valuable as the theological spread, is the methodological variations. Osborne's high view of scripture controls his use of modern critical methods because scripture, not human reason, is the final authority. Harrington's acceptance of church authority guides his use of criticism, and he is comfortable with critical authority so long as it does not contradict church teaching. Burgess, the Lutheran, incorporates almost the full range of modern critical conclusions. Osborne and Burgess frequently hold opposite views, while Harrington seems to stand somewhere in the middle. Each writer presents a brief, but clear, statement of how he deals with scripture and then demonstrates his practice with a short exegesis of *Ephesians* 2:1-10.

This book will be useful to chaplains. Chaplains are commonly questioned regarding various Christian groups' interpretation of scripture. Reading and discussing such a book among chaplains



would encourage understanding and respect for the various traditions among us. The authors do not expect their readers to be Bible experts, only that they are interested. This reviewer would like to see more books like this one written on other topics which divide the church ecclesiastically, theologically, and methodologically.

Chaplain (CPT) Douglas McCready  
Pennsylvania Army National Guard

### ***Making Your Marriage Work***

Mary and Andrew Jensen

Augsburg, 1985 Paper, 142 pages \$6.50

The authors of *Making Your Marriage Work* went to great lengths to have their book, in their own words, "ring true." The Jensens have written on the basis of thorough knowledge and long experience. They have succeeded in producing a solid and imaginative, readable and believable, communicative yet largely didactic-free series of marriage vignettes which should prove to be an impressive and practical resource for couples, pastors, counselors, and groups. The vignettes are free of technical language and jargon yet filled with mature insight, sound psychology, and a lively religious faith.

Discussion helps which focus on problems, pressures, feelings, expectations, and sometimes on elements as particular as laughter and tears, accompany each of the vignettes. Throughout the presentation there is an emphasis on how the church and the faith can play a role in helping couples cope creatively and responsibly with marriage problems. In the book's presentation even the research questionnaire provides valuable insight and creative possibilities.

While the scenes portrayed here are realistic and the questions are probing and helpful, the singular interest and format of the book illustrates how slow the church is to deal with marriage problems in the mid-80's. *Making Your Marriage Work* is an outstanding vehicle for encouraging creative maturity in modern marriages and for renewing a commitment to one's marriage partner and to God.

Chaplain Lt. Col. James W. Kinney  
USAF

### ***The Peacemongers***

Robert Duncan Culver

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1985 Paper \$5.95

How should Christians respond to violence? From the beginning the church has felt itself pulled between two contradictory answers to the question: the majority opinion has been that civil government is

instituted by God to protect the weak from the strong and to punish those who do evil; as long as it does not impose upon the consciences of its citizens, Christians are free to support it. On the other hand a minority have held that the plain testimony of scripture forbids Christians to participate in violence, whether as individuals or as agents of the civil order. While acknowledging that the state is legitimately empowered by God to wield the sword for the preservation of peace and the punishment of the guilty, they insist that violence is a resort to sub-Christian ethics which no state can compel of its believing citizens. As a result they have adopted a pacifist stance toward violence which has often brought them into conflict with the civil authorities and with other Christians.

With the advent of nuclear weapons and the emergence of the modern peace movement, the question of the Christian's response to violence has taken on a new immediacy. In this book, Robert Duncan Culver examines modern pacifism and concludes that it represents a significant and potentially dangerous departure from the stance of the traditional peace churches.

While the leaders of the modern peace movement attempt to place themselves within the biblical tradition of groups such as the Mennonites, Mr. Culver contends that the roots of their pacifism lie instead in the reductionism of radical New Testament scholarship which places them "outside the authentic succession of separatist nonresistance." John Howard Yoder of Goshen Biblical Seminary in particular is the object of Mr. Culver's critique.

Mr. Culver asserts that "Yoder sets aside orthodox understanding and places his pacifist doctrine at the center of the gospel." For Yoder, "nonresistance is the gospel." As far as this reviewer can determine, Mr. Yoder is here still in the mainstream of nonresistance, since pacifists are defined as people who have elevated the principal of nonresistance to the center of the gospel. But as one reads on, one discovers that Mr. Yoder is a pacifist with a difference. Like many of the "new breed" of peace church activists, he has a political agenda which goes far beyond the separationism of his forebears, "the main project of his kind of Christianity is the establishment of peace and justice (that is, economic equality) in the world among all nations." In other words, John Howard Yoder and others have made pacifism a means by which they can further "a program of statist socialism," "peace in the world and redistribution of goods and property." Here we see revealed that familiar old reprobate secular utopianism newly rouged and adorned in the rhetoric of the religious Left.

That segments of the church have been co-opted by the spirit of the age and are fast accepting a number of false assumptions about human nature and the role of politics in the world is an appalling

fact. In this reviewer's opinion, this book may help those who are approaching the subject of violence and modern nonresistance for the first time and who want a brief overview. Others would profit more from Reinhold Neibuhr's essays on pacifism which are as thought-provoking now as when they were written forty and more years ago.

Chaplain (1LT) Carl R. Schmahl  
New York Army National Guard



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